Sudan's Islamic Turn: Elite Appropriation of Belief and the Fracturing of a Nation (1956–2011)

A Case Study in the Strategic Deployment of Religion as Power Infrastructure

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Framework Applied: Analytical Framework for Elite Power and Belief Systems (V2.1) integrated with the Expanded Core Framework (8-Part Structure)

Part 1 of 4

INTRODUCTION: THE SMOKING GUN IN PLAIN SIGHT

On September 8, 1983, President Gaafar Muhammad al-Nimeiry of Sudan stood before his nation and declared the imposition of Islamic Sharia law across the entire country. He ordered the public dumping of all alcoholic beverages in Khartoum, exchanged his military uniform for the robes of a devout Muslim, and proclaimed himself the "Imam of the Sudanese Umma"—the spiritual leader and guide of the nation's faithful. Within months, amputations for theft and public floggings for alcohol consumption became commonplace. Sudan, a country of extraordinary ethnic and religious diversity, was to be refashioned as an Islamic state under the personal spiritual authority of a military dictator who, only fifteen years earlier, had seized power as a socialist Pan-Arabist allied with communists.

The September Laws, as they became known, are among the most transparently documented cases in modern history of an elite actor strategically appropriating a pre-existing belief system for explicitly political purposes. The documentary record is unambiguous: Sudan's foreign debt had reached approximately $9 billion; inflation exceeded 40 percent; agricultural and industrial production had collapsed in per capita terms; the value of the Sudanese pound had fallen to less than 10 percent of its 1978 level; and the country was sliding toward famine. Nimeiry's political base had eroded to virtually nothing after years of authoritarian misrule, broken promises, and economic catastrophe. He had alienated the left through purges, the traditional religious parties through suppression, the south through the abrogation of autonomy agreements, and the army through cronyism and incompetence.

Into this political vacuum stepped Hassan al-Turabi, the Sorbonne-educated leader of Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood, who offered Nimeiry a lifeline: the Brotherhood's organizational networks, its cadre of loyal judges and administrators, its financial resources from Gulf donors, and its capacity to mobilize popular support—all in exchange for the implementation of Islamic law and Brotherhood access to state institutions. The transaction was, in the assessment of virtually every serious historian of the period, a calculated political bargain. Nimeiry adopted Islam as state ideology not because he experienced a spiritual transformation but because he had exhausted every other source of political legitimacy and the Islamists were the only organized force willing to prop up his failing regime.

Yet this transparently political maneuver was experienced and understood by millions of ordinary Sudanese Muslims not as a cynical elite bargain but as something profoundly different: as their nation finally embracing its authentic Islamic identity, as a return to roots after decades of Western-imposed secularism, as a spiritual awakening that expressed the deep convictions of the faithful. The Brotherhood's network of mosques, schools, student organizations, and media operations reframed Nimeiry's desperate political calculation as the fulfillment of a long-deferred national destiny. And this reframing proved so durable that the Islamic project outlived Nimeiry himself—he was overthrown in April 1985, but the September Laws were never fully repealed. The Islamist movement rode the narrative infrastructure Nimeiry had built all the way to the 1989 military coup that installed Omar al-Bashir, giving al-Turabi's National Islamic Front three decades of power and ultimately fracturing the nation in two when South Sudan seceded in 2011.

This case study demonstrates the Analytical Framework for Elite Power and Belief Systems operating under modern documentary conditions where the evidentiary record eliminates reasonable doubt about elite motivation. Unlike ancient cases where we must infer elite consciousness from circumstantial evidence—the timing of Constantine's conversion, the political context of Akhenaten's religious revolution—the Sudanese case provides direct documentation of the material calculations driving religious transformation. We have the economic data. We have the political chronology. We have the specific quid pro quo between Nimeiry and al-Turabi. We have Nimeiry's own later admission of regret, blaming al-Turabi for "secretly engineering" the execution of the Islamic reformer Mahmoud Mohammed Taha. We have al-Turabi's own strategic writings explaining how the Brotherhood methodically planned to capture the state through Islamic institutions.

The case is classified as a **Hybrid strategy** under the framework's typology:

Appropriation: Islam was deeply embedded in northern Sudanese identity—centuries of Sufi orders, the Mahdist legacy, Arab-Islamic cultural identification, daily practice woven into family life and community ritual. Nimeiry did not create Islamic sentiment; he captured and redirected existing belief infrastructure that was already the dominant organizing principle of northern Sudanese society.

Invention: The specific form of political Islam imposed through the September Laws—hudud punishments, Islamic banking mandates, the president as "imam," the particular fusion of

Brotherhood ideology with state power—was new. It was al-Turabi's modernist Islamism grafted onto popular Sufi piety, a construction that many traditional religious authorities in Sudan explicitly rejected as inauthentic and politically motivated.

Suppression: Alternative interpretations of Islam were eliminated, most dramatically through the execution of Mahmoud Mohammed Taha in January 1985—a seventy-six-year-old Islamic reformer whose progressive "Second Message of Islam" offered a vision of the faith grounded in freedom, equality, and inclusion. His death was a textbook case of suppressing an alternative interpretation that threatened the appropriated narrative. Southern Christianity, animism, and secular Sudanese nationalism were simultaneously marginalized and ultimately provoked into armed rebellion.

The study proceeds through the eight-part analytical structure of the Expanded Core Framework, demonstrating at each stage how belief functioned as infrastructure for elite power—and how the gap between elite consciousness (strategic deployment of Islam) and common unconsciousness (genuine faith experienced as organic movement) produced consequences that continue to shape the Horn of Africa.

I. FOUNDATION CONDITIONS: THE BELIEF LANDSCAPE NIMEIRY INHERITED

The Deep Roots: Islam in Northern Sudan

Understanding why Nimeiry's Islamic turn was an act of appropriation rather than invention requires understanding how deeply Islam was embedded in northern Sudanese society long before the September Laws. The framework's core principle—that appropriation succeeds because it captures beliefs "already embedded, already internalized, already having infrastructure"—describes the Sudanese case precisely.

Islam arrived in Sudan through centuries of gradual penetration rather than sudden conquest. Arab traders, migrants, and missionaries moved up the Nile and across the Red Sea from at least the seventh century, intermarrying with local populations and introducing Islamic practice alongside existing belief systems. By the time of the Funj Sultanate (1504–1821), the first major Islamic state in the Sudanese Nile Valley, Islam had become the dominant religious identity of the riverine north. But it was a particular kind of Islam—deeply Sufi in character, organized around religious orders (tariqas) that combined orthodox practice with local spiritual traditions, saint veneration, and mystical devotion. The Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya, Tijaniyya, and Sammaniyya orders each maintained networks of teachers, students, shrines, and communal rituals that structured village life across the northern regions.

This Sufi Islam was not merely a set of abstract theological propositions; it was the social infrastructure of everyday existence. Birth ceremonies, circumcision rites, marriage customs,

funeral practices, seasonal agricultural rituals, dispute resolution, and communal identity all operated through Islamic frameworks transmitted across generations within family and village structures. Children learned the Quran in khalwas (Quranic schools) that served simultaneously as literacy centers, socialization institutions, and community gathering points. The holy men (fakis) who ran these institutions wielded enormous local influence—mediating disputes, blessing crops, advising on marriage, and interpreting divine will for populations who regarded them as conduits of sacred knowledge.

The framework identifies this as the ideal condition for elite appropriation: beliefs that are "already embedded (generational transmission, family rituals), already internalized (people genuinely believe, not cynically comply), and already have infrastructure (stories, rituals, specialists)." Northern Sudanese Islam satisfied every criterion. The elite who wished to harness this infrastructure did not need to convince people that Islam was true—they already believed it with total sincerity. The elite needed only to capture the interpretation of what Islam required in the political sphere.

The Mahdist Precedent: Belief as Revolutionary Infrastructure

The most dramatic demonstration of Islam's power as political infrastructure in Sudan occurred a century before Nimeiry, when Muhammad Ahmad declared himself the Mahdi—the divinely guided redeemer foretold in Islamic eschatology—and launched a revolution against the Turko-Egyptian administration in 1881. The Mahdist movement is itself a textbook case of belief appropriation that directly shaped the political landscape Nimeiry inherited.

Muhammad Ahmad was born in 1844 into a family that claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Initially a member of the Sammaniyya Sufi order, he developed his own following through a reputation for extreme piety, asceticism, and mystical insight. His declaration as the Mahdi drew on a pre-existing eschatological belief—widespread across the Muslim world and deeply embedded in Sudanese Sufi traditions—that a divinely guided figure would appear to restore justice and true Islam before the end of days. Ahmad did not invent this expectation; he appropriated it by claiming to be its fulfillment.

The political context was critical. The Turko-Egyptian administration, which had ruled Sudan since 1821, was widely despised for its extraction, corruption, slave-trading despite nominal abolition, forced labor, and cultural contempt for Sudanese populations. The Mahdi's genius was fusing this political grievance with the religious narrative: the Turko-Egyptian rulers were not merely bad administrators but heretics and infidels who had corrupted true Islam, and jihad against them was therefore a religious obligation, not merely a political rebellion. He deliberately modeled his movement on the Prophet Muhammad's own career—calling his followers "Ansar" (helpers, the term Muhammad used for the people of Medina), describing his strategic retreat as a "hijra" (migration, echoing Muhammad's flight from Mecca), and appointing three caliphs corresponding to Abu Bakr, Umar, and Ali.

This narrative engineering proved devastatingly effective. The Mahdi's forces, often armed only with sticks and spears, defeated multiple Egyptian expeditions through the sheer force of

religiously motivated conviction. They besieged and captured Khartoum in January 1885, killing the British governor General Charles Gordon, and established an independent Mahdist state that governed Sudan until the Anglo-Egyptian reconquest in 1898. The movement's success illustrated the framework's central insight about the force-multiplying power of belief: armies that fight for divine mandate require far less material inducement than armies that fight for wages.

The Mahdist state ultimately failed—defeated by the overwhelming technological superiority of Lord Kitchener's Anglo-Egyptian army at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898—but its political and spiritual legacy proved ineradicable. The Mahdi's posthumous son, Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, transformed the Ansar from a defeated military movement into a political-religious organization that dominated northern Sudanese politics throughout the colonial period and into independence. The Ansar became the base of the Umma Party, led by the Mahdi's great-grandson Sadiq al-Mahdi, which remained one of Sudan's two major political parties through the twentieth century.

This history meant that by the time Nimeiry came to power, Islam in Sudan was not merely a private faith but an already-politicized identity with established organizational infrastructure, proven capacity for mass mobilization, and a living memory of a theocratic state that had successfully challenged imperial power. The question was never whether Islam would be central to Sudanese politics, but which interpretation of Islam would prevail and which elite faction would control it.

The Colonial Architecture of Division: Britain's "Southern Policy"

The British colonial administration of Sudan (1899–1956) created the structural conditions that would make Nimeiry's Islamic turn so consequential—and so destructive—by systematically constructing an administrative, economic, and cultural divide between north and south that had no precedent in pre-colonial Sudanese history.

The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, established after the defeat of the Mahdist state, divided Sudan into two administratively distinct zones. The north, with its Arab-Islamic culture, Nile-based agriculture, and proximity to Egypt and the Mediterranean trade networks, was developed as the productive core of the colony. The British invested in the Gezira Irrigation Scheme (the world's largest irrigated agricultural project at the time), built educational institutions including Gordon Memorial College (later the University of Khartoum), and trained northern Sudanese for positions in the colonial civil service. Northern elites were incorporated into the administration as junior partners—a classic strategy of indirect rule that created a local governing class with material interests aligned with colonial power.

The south received virtually nothing. Under the "Southern Policy" formalized in the 1920s and reinforced by the Closed Districts Ordinance of 1922, the British administered the southern regions as a separate territory with different rules, different languages of administration (English rather than Arabic), different educational systems (missionary-run rather than government schools), and different economic priorities (subsistence rather than export production). The stated rationale was protection—preventing northern Arab merchants and slave traders from

exploiting southern populations. The practical effect was the systematic underdevelopment of the south and the construction of a cultural barrier between two regions that would be united into a single state at independence.

The religious dimension of this division was particularly consequential. In the north, the British managed the existing Islamic infrastructure—cultivating relationships with the Ansar and Khatmiyya Sufi orders, using traditional religious leaders as intermediaries, and generally allowing Islamic education and practice to continue under colonial supervision. In the south, Christian missionaries were given effective control of education, health, and social services. The result was not the Christianization of the south—most southern populations maintained indigenous belief systems alongside selective adoption of Christian elements—but the creation of a southern identity that was emphatically not Arab and not Muslim.

When Sudan gained independence in 1956, the consequences of this colonial architecture became immediately apparent. Of approximately eight hundred positions vacated by departing British administrators, only six went to southerners. The newly independent government was dominated by northern Arab-Muslim elites who had been groomed for governance by the colonial system, while southern populations were systematically excluded from power. The south's first civil war erupted before independence was even formalized, in 1955, when southern soldiers mutinied against orders to transfer to northern garrisons. This first civil war (1955–1972) killed over half a million people and established the pattern that would define Sudanese politics for the next six decades: northern elite control legitimated by Islamic and Arab identity, southern resistance to that control, and periodic attempts at accommodation that invariably collapsed when northern elites calculated that Islamic consolidation served their interests better than power-sharing.

The Sectarian Chessboard: Ansar, Khatmiyya, and the Muslim Brotherhood

The post-independence political landscape that Nimeiry navigated was dominated by three religious-political formations, each representing a different relationship between belief and political power.

The **Ansar/Umma Party**, led by the Mahdi's descendants, represented the largest religious constituency in northern Sudan. Their base was concentrated in western Sudan (Darfur, Kordofan) and among the riverine populations of central Sudan. The Ansar identity combined religious devotion to the Mahdist tradition with a political platform of Sudanese independence and Islamic governance. Their leader, Sadiq al-Mahdi—Oxford-educated, intellectually sophisticated, and personally devout—embodied the fusion of traditional religious authority with modern political ambition. The Umma Party advocated "Sudan for the Sudanese" and positioned itself as the authentic voice of Sudanese Islamic identity.

The **Khatmiyya/Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)**, founded on the older Khatmiyya Sufi order established in 1817, represented a rival center of Islamic political authority. Based primarily in eastern Sudan and Khartoum, the Khatmiyya had historically maintained close ties to Egypt and had supported unity with Egypt during the independence debates. Their Islam was

characterized by Sufi moderation, tolerance, and a relatively accommodating stance toward pluralism. The DUP under the Mirghani family provided the primary political alternative to the Umma Party in northern Sudanese democratic politics.

The **Muslim Brotherhood/Islamic Charter Front**, later the National Islamic Front (NIF), represented something entirely different: a modern, ideological Islamic movement transplanted from Egypt that sought to capture the state through organized political action rather than traditional religious authority. The Brotherhood arrived in Sudan in the 1940s as a student movement, initially tiny and politically marginal. It never achieved mass popularity through elections—in the 1965 elections, the Islamic Charter Front received only an insignificant portion of the popular vote, and even at its electoral peak in 1986, the NIF came third behind both the Umma Party and the DUP.

What the Brotherhood lacked in popular support, it compensated for through organizational discipline, strategic infiltration of institutions, and the brilliance of its leader, Hassan al-Turabi. Born in 1932 to a family of Sufi religious scholars, Turabi was educated at the University of Khartoum and the Sorbonne, where he earned a doctorate in law. He combined genuine Islamic scholarship with a sophisticated understanding of modern political organization, creating a movement that was simultaneously religious in its appeal and ruthlessly strategic in its methods. From the 1960s onward, Turabi systematically placed Brotherhood members in the judiciary, the civil service, the military, the banking sector, and the educational system. He built financial networks connecting Sudanese Islamists to Gulf donors. He cultivated relationships with military officers sympathetic to Islamic governance. And he waited for the moment when a weakened regime would need what only the Brotherhood could offer: organized political support in exchange for institutional access.

The framework's analysis of elite consciousness applies with striking precision to al-Turabi. His writings and public statements consistently articulated Islam as a comprehensive system of governance—not merely a private faith but a political program requiring state implementation. Yet the evidence of his career demonstrates something the framework would predict: a sophisticated understanding of belief as instrumental to political power. Turabi did not merely believe in Islamic governance as an abstract ideal; he pursued it through decades of patient institutional infiltration, strategic alliance-building, financial engineering, and ultimately, the orchestration of a military coup. When he famously told Bashir in 1989 to "go to the palace as president" while sending himself "to prison as an inmate" to disguise the NIF's role in the coup from Egypt, he displayed the kind of strategic consciousness that the framework identifies as characteristic of elite actors who understand belief as a tool of power—even when they may sincerely hold the beliefs they instrumentalize.

Nimeiry's Political Trajectory: From Socialism to Islam

Against this background of deeply embedded Islamic identity and competing elite factions seeking to control its political expression, Gaafar Nimeiry's career illustrates the framework's insight that elites select belief strategies based on material calculations about political survival rather than sincere conviction.

Nimeiry seized power on May 25, 1969, through a military coup modeled on Nasser's Egyptian revolution. He was then a colonel with socialist sympathies, Pan-Arabist convictions, and close ties to Sudan's Communist Party. His Revolutionary Command Council abolished parliament, outlawed political parties, nationalized banks and industries, and pursued land reform. He suppressed the traditional religious parties—the Ansar suffered a devastating military assault on Aba Island in 1970 that killed thousands and forced the Mahdi family into exile, while the Khatmiyya and other religious organizations were marginalized.

In 1971, Nimeiry survived a Communist-backed coup attempt, after which he brutally purged the left and executed Communist leaders. Having destroyed his leftist allies, he pivoted toward the West, forging close relationships with the United States (which valued Sudan as a regional counterweight to Soviet-aligned Ethiopia) and Anwar Sadat's Egypt. American aid increased from $5 million in 1979 to $200 million in 1983, primarily for military programs. Nimeiry's Sudan became one of the largest recipients of U.S. military aid worldwide.

In 1972, Nimeiry achieved his greatest political success: the Addis Ababa Agreement, which ended the first civil war by granting southern Sudan regional autonomy, including its own legislature, control over local affairs, and recognition of the south's cultural and religious diversity. The agreement was widely praised internationally and brought a decade of relative peace. It also established the principle that Sudan was a pluralistic nation where Islamic law would not be imposed on non-Muslim populations—a principle that would prove incompatible with the political strategy Nimeiry adopted a decade later.

By the late 1970s, Nimeiry's political position was deteriorating. His economic development schemes—the "breadbasket strategy" that envisioned Sudan as the agricultural supplier of the Arab world—had failed catastrophically. Massive borrowing to finance irrigation projects, infrastructure, and the Jonglei Canal produced debt without production. The projects came in late, over budget, and underperforming. The external debt, which stood at $3 billion in 1978, was approaching $9–10 billion by the early 1980s. Inflation reached 40–60 percent. The Sudanese pound lost 90 percent of its value against the dollar. Industrial and agricultural output declined in per capita terms. Food shortages became critical as drought compounded mismanagement.

Politically, Nimeiry had run through every available alliance. He had used and discarded the Communists, alienated the Ansar and Khatmiyya through suppression, exhausted Western patience through economic incompetence, and lost popular support through authoritarian rule. His response was characteristically autocratic: he ordered the State Security Organisation to imprison thousands of opponents without trial, dismissed any minister or officer who appeared to be developing an independent power base, and replaced competent administrators with personal loyalists regardless of ability.

It was precisely at this moment of maximum political vulnerability that Nimeiry began his "reconciliation" with the Islamists. In 1977, he reached an agreement with the opposition National Front (which included Sadiq al-Mahdi's Umma Party), releasing political prisoners and allowing exiled opponents to return. As part of this reconciliation, he agreed to form a committee

to align Sudanese laws with Islamic principles. Al-Turabi, who had been imprisoned and then exiled after Nimeiry's 1969 revolution, was invited back to Sudan and appointed Attorney General in 1979.

The reconciliation was transparently transactional. Nimeiry needed organized political support from somewhere—anywhere—to sustain his crumbling regime. The Brotherhood offered the most disciplined, best-financed, and most strategically organized political force available. They used the reconciliation period, as multiple scholars have documented, to systematically infiltrate the civil service, introduce Islamic banking, place Brotherhood sympathizers in the judiciary and military, and build the institutional infrastructure that would sustain Islamist power long after Nimeiry himself was gone.

II. NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION: THE ENGINEERING OF SUDAN'S ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

The September Laws: Anatomy of a Political Appropriation

The Analytical Framework classifies elite belief strategies along a spectrum from appropriation to invention. Nimeiry's September Laws represent a textbook hybrid: the appropriation of deeply embedded Islamic identity combined with the invention of specific institutional forms that served elite political interests while having no precedent in Sudanese Islamic practice.

The appropriation dimension is straightforward. Northern Sudanese had been Muslims for centuries. Islamic practice structured their daily lives, their family relationships, their communal identities, and their moral frameworks. The demand for Islamic governance was not manufactured by Nimeiry or al-Turabi—it was a genuine aspiration shared by significant segments of the northern population, articulated through decades of political debate about the role of Sharia in the Sudanese state. The 1968 draft constitution had proposed making Islam the state religion and Arabic the official language. Multiple political parties had campaigned on Islamic platforms. The question of Sharia's role in Sudanese law had been a central issue in every democratic period since independence.

What Nimeiry did was capture this pre-existing aspiration and redirect it to serve his specific political survival. The September Laws were not the product of scholarly deliberation, popular referendum, or even consultation with Sudan's established Islamic authorities. They were drafted hastily by a small group within the Presidential Palace—al-Turabi's associates, including followers of the Abu Qurun Sufi order with which Nimeiry had personally affiliated—and imposed by presidential decree under Article 106 of the 1973 constitution, which allowed "provisional orders" when the People's Assembly was not in session. Every law was subsequently rubber-stamped by the Assembly, but the process was an exercise in executive fiat, not democratic deliberation.

The content of the September Laws revealed their invented character. Sudan's Islamic legal tradition, shaped by centuries of Sufi practice and Maliki jurisprudence, had never featured the dramatic hudud punishments that became the public face of Nimeiry's Islamization. Public amputations for theft, floggings for alcohol consumption, and the spectacle of mass alcohol destruction were theatrical performances designed to demonstrate Islamic credentials rather than expressions of established Sudanese religious practice. Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of the Ansar—the largest traditional Islamic constituency in Sudan—publicly denounced the September Laws as un-Islamic and corrupt, and was jailed for his opposition. The fact that the leader of the country's largest Islamic movement rejected the laws as contrary to genuine Islamic principles underscores their character as political invention rather than organic religious expression.

The economic dimensions of the September Laws further reveal their instrumentality. Alongside the dramatic criminal penalties, Nimeiry introduced Islamic banking regulations and the zakat (Islamic charitable tax) system. The zakat law created a new mechanism of revenue collection and distribution that, in practice, functioned as a parallel taxation system controlled by Islamist loyalists rather than the existing bureaucracy. Islamic banking regulations transformed the financial sector in ways that benefited Brotherhood-connected financial institutions while disrupting established economic relationships. These were not spiritual measures; they were mechanisms for redirecting economic flows toward the Islamist faction that now constituted Nimeiry's primary political base.

The Interpretive Class: How the Brotherhood Reframed Political Calculation as Spiritual Destiny

The framework identifies the "interpretive class"—those who control the meaning of belief systems for the broader population—as the critical node in any belief-as-power arrangement. In Sudan, the Brotherhood's organizational network functioned as precisely this kind of interpretive infrastructure, translating Nimeiry's transparently political maneuver into a narrative of spiritual fulfillment.

The Brotherhood's institutional presence extended far beyond formal politics. Through decades of patient cultivation, al-Turabi's movement had established itself in universities (where Islamist student organizations dominated campus politics), professional associations (particularly among lawyers, doctors, and engineers), the banking sector (through Islamic financial institutions), the judiciary (through Brotherhood-sympathetic judges and legal scholars), and the media. When Nimeiry declared the September Laws, this network activated to frame the declaration not as what it manifestly was—a desperate dictator buying political support from the only organized faction willing to sell it—but as the culmination of decades of Islamic aspiration, the return of Sudan to its authentic identity, and the beginning of a new era of spiritual renewal.

The large marches organized by the Brotherhood in support of the September Laws were not spontaneous expressions of popular piety but carefully orchestrated demonstrations of political muscle. The Brotherhood deployed its networks of judges, including prominent figures like Muhammad Mahjoub Haj Nour and Al-Makashfi Taha Al-Kabashi, to staff the new Islamic

courts, giving the legal machinery of Islamization an appearance of religious legitimacy. Brotherhood-connected media outlets amplified the narrative of Islamic revival, presenting the September Laws as the answer to Sudan's economic and social problems—a claim that became increasingly absurd as economic conditions continued to deteriorate.

The framework's concept of "elite-common asymmetry" applies with particular force here. At the elite level—among al-Turabi, his inner circle, and the senior Brotherhood leadership—the strategic character of the Islamization project was understood. These were educated professionals who had spent decades planning the institutional capture of the Sudanese state and who understood the September Laws as a vehicle for that capture. Al-Turabi's own writings, his famous instruction to Bashir during the 1989 coup, and the systematic way the Brotherhood used its access to state power to place loyalists in key positions all demonstrate sophisticated strategic consciousness.

At the common level—among ordinary northern Sudanese Muslims who had spent their lives praying, fasting, giving zakat, and yearning for a more Islamic society—the September Laws were received through an entirely different interpretive frame. These were people for whom Islam was not a political strategy but the deepest truth of their existence. When their president declared that Sudan would now govern itself according to Islamic law, many experienced this as the fulfillment of a long-held aspiration. They did not see the $9 billion debt, the quid pro quo with the Brotherhood, or the strategic calculation behind the timing. They saw their faith being honored by the state. The belief was genuine even as its political deployment was strategic—exactly the asymmetry the framework predicts.

The Execution of Mahmoud Mohammed Taha: Suppressing the Alternative Interpretation

If the September Laws represent elite appropriation and invention, the execution of Mahmoud Mohammed Taha on January 18, 1985, represents the suppression component of the hybrid strategy—and it illuminates the framework's insight about why shared narratives make internal challenges more dangerous than external ones.

Taha was not an atheist, a secularist, or an enemy of Islam. He was a devout Muslim who had spent decades developing a progressive Islamic theology called the "Second Message of Islam." Born in 1909, educated as a civil engineer at Gordon Memorial College, Taha founded the Republican Party in 1945 as an anti-colonial movement and subsequently devoted his life to religious scholarship. His central theological innovation was the argument that the Quranic verses revealed in Mecca—emphasizing freedom, equality, and universal human dignity—represented the ideal, eternal message of Islam, while the Medina verses—containing the specific legal prescriptions that formed the basis of traditional Sharia—were historically contingent adaptations to seventh-century conditions. For Taha, authentic Islamic renewal meant returning to the Meccan principles rather than rigidly applying Medinan prescriptions.

This theology was profoundly threatening to the September Laws precisely because it operated within the same sacred narrative. Taha did not reject the Quran—he offered an alternative

interpretation of it. He did not oppose Islam—he proposed a different understanding of what Islam required. His "Republican Brothers" movement, though small, demonstrated that Islamic commitment could lead to conclusions diametrically opposed to those being imposed by the state: gender equality rather than patriarchal control, religious pluralism rather than Islamic supremacy, democratic governance rather than theocratic authority, progressive reform rather than hudud punishments.

The framework's analysis of suppression within shared narratives applies precisely. External challenges to a legitimating narrative are relatively easy to manage—they can be dismissed as foreign, heretical, or simply wrong. But internal challenges, those that use the same sacred texts to reach opposite conclusions, threaten the elite's monopoly on interpretation. If ordinary Muslims could be persuaded that "true Islam" meant freedom and equality rather than amputations and floggings, the entire political project of the September Laws would collapse.

Taha's arrest on January 5, 1985, followed his distribution of pamphlets calling for the abolition of the September Laws, an end to the civil war in the south, and the beginning of a free national dialogue about Sudan's future. He was charged under articles relating to sedition and opposition to the government, but neither the original charges nor the trial itself mentioned apostasy. It was the Special Court of Appeal that, on its own initiative and without the accused present, introduced the apostasy charge and sentenced Taha to death. The legal scholar Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im has documented exhaustively that the trial violated multiple provisions of Sudan's own constitution, including the guarantees of freedom of thought, belief, and expression. The prosecution produced only one witness—a police officer—and the entire trial lasted two hours.

The political engineering behind the execution is further revealed by the circumstances. Multiple sources indicate that the Muslim World League pressured Nimeiry to have Taha executed, and that one factor in Nimeiry's compliance was his need to restore credibility in international Islamic circles after providing assistance to Israel in evacuating Ethiopian Jews (the Falasha). Fifteen years after the execution, Nimeiry himself expressed regret and blamed al-Turabi for "secretly engineering" the death. This mutual finger-pointing between the two architects of the September Laws confirms that the execution was a political calculation, not a religious verdict—each man recognized it as such and sought to deflect responsibility for it.

Taha's execution produced consequences the framework would predict. Thousands of demonstrators protested in Khartoum despite police on horseback using bullwhips to disperse them. The date of his execution, January 18, was subsequently designated Arab Human Rights Day. The shock of executing a seventy-six-year-old Islamic reformer for the crime of offering an alternative interpretation of the Quran contributed significantly to the popular uprising that overthrew Nimeiry just four months later. The execution demonstrated both the power and the cost of suppressing internal challenges to appropriated narratives: the alternative voice was silenced, but at the price of exposing the regime's willingness to kill in defense of its monopoly on religious interpretation.

Nimeiry's Fall and the Narrative's Persistence

The framework predicts that regimes dependent on invented rather than appropriated beliefs are unstable—they lack the deep roots that make populations voluntarily comply across generations. Nimeiry's regime collapsed precisely as the framework would predict: not because Sudanese rejected Islam, but because the invented elements of his Islamic project (personal rule as "imam," economic policies disguised as Islamic banking, theatrical punishments) could not substitute for the genuine governance capacity his regime lacked.

In early 1985, Sudan faced fuel and bread shortages in Khartoum, drought and famine across the country, a growing insurgency in the south, and a refugee crisis. When Nimeiry traveled abroad in April, massive demonstrations erupted, triggered by price increases on basic staples. On April 6, senior military officers led by General Suwar al-Dahab mounted a coup. Among the new government's first acts was suspending the 1983 constitution and dissolving Nimeiry's Sudan Socialist Union. Nimeiry went into exile in Egypt.

But here is the critical finding for the framework: **the September Laws were never fully repealed.** The transitional military government suspended their enforcement but did not abolish them. The democratic government of Sadiq al-Mahdi, elected in 1986, was unable to revoke the laws despite this being a condition of peace negotiations with the southern SPLM. Even Sadiq, the leader of the Ansar who had been jailed for calling the September Laws un-Islamic, felt unable to formally abrogate Sharia once it had been established as state law. The DUP leader Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani similarly "refrained from public criticism of Nimeiri's September Laws so as not to alienate Khatmiyyah followers who approved of implementing the sharia."

This persistence demonstrates the framework's core insight about the durability of appropriation. Nimeiry's personal rule collapsed because it was invented—dependent on one man's political survival rather than embedded in institutional structures. But the Islamic narrative he had attached to the state survived because it was appropriated—it drew on centuries of genuine belief that could not be simply switched off when the political actor who had instrumentalized it fell from power. Once the September Laws existed, repealing them meant appearing to oppose Islam itself, a political impossibility in a country where the vast majority of the northern population was devoutly Muslim. The narrative had become, in the framework's terms, a constraint on subsequent elites even as it remained a tool that future elites (specifically al-Turabi and Bashir) would use to seize and consolidate power.

The gap between Nimeiry's fall in 1985 and al-Bashir's coup in 1989 thus illustrates one of the framework's most important dynamics: the asymmetry between the ease of establishing a narrative and the difficulty of dismantling it. Nimeiry built the Islamic infrastructure in months through executive decree. Dismantling it would have required political courage that no subsequent leader possessed, because the narrative—once established—constrained the very elites who might have wished to remove it. Sudan was trapped in the architecture of belief that a failing dictator had constructed for the most cynical of political reasons.

This is Part 1 of 4 in "Sudan's Islamic Turn: Elite Appropriation of Belief and the Fracturing of a Nation (1956–2011)."

Part 2 will continue with Legal and Institutional Frameworks, Wealth Extraction Mechanisms, and Information Control—examining how the Islamist capture of state institutions under al-Turabi and Bashir transformed Nimeiry's desperate political maneuver into a comprehensive system of elite power, and how oil wealth discovered in the south became the material prize that Islamic governance was ultimately designed to control.

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Part 2 of 4

III. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF ISLAMIST STATE CAPTURE

The 1989 Coup: Belief as Cover for Institutional Seizure

The framework identifies legal and institutional frameworks as the structures that "provide procedural legitimacy while facilitating extraction." In Sudan, the most consequential institutional transformation occurred not through Nimeiry's theatrical September Laws but through the far more systematic and durable restructuring of the state that followed the June 30, 1989, military coup—a seizure of power that illustrates the framework's analysis of elite coordination with particular clarity.

The coup's choreography was itself an exercise in narrative engineering. Brigadier General Omar al-Bashir, a career military officer who had served in the southern war, was announced as the leader of the "Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation." All political parties were banned. Leading politicians were arrested, including, conspicuously, Hassan al-Turabi himself. The performance was designed to create the appearance of a conventional military takeover—the kind of intervention that Sudan had experienced in 1958 and 1969 and that regional powers, particularly Egypt, might accept as a regrettable but understandable response to political instability.

The reality, thoroughly documented in subsequent scholarship and confirmed by participants on all sides, was that the coup had been masterminded by al-Turabi and the NIF. Al-Turabi had spent years systematically infiltrating the officer corps, recruiting mid-level military men sympathetic to the Islamist cause through the same networks of student organizations, professional associations, and religious institutions that constituted the Brotherhood's broader infrastructure. Bashir himself had been cultivated through these channels. When the time came, al-Turabi orchestrated the coup to preempt Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi's negotiations with the southern SPLA—negotiations that threatened to freeze the September Laws and potentially roll back the Islamist project that had been under construction since 1977.

Al-Turabi's famous instruction to Bashir—to "go to the palace as president" while al-Turabi went "to prison as an inmate"—was a masterpiece of strategic deception. Egypt, which would have opposed an openly Islamist government across its southern border, welcomed what appeared to be a military intervention. The international community treated the coup as yet another unfortunate African military takeover. And al-Turabi, released from his brief and comfortable detention within months, assumed the role of what Human Rights Watch called "the power behind the throne"—the intellectual architect of an Islamist state that would govern Sudan for the next three decades.

This sequence demonstrates the framework's insight that elite actors deploying belief systems often display sophisticated consciousness of what they are doing. Al-Turabi did not stumble into power through naive religious conviction. He executed a multi-decade strategy of institutional infiltration, alliance-building, and ultimately military seizure, using Islamic governance as both the sincere objective and the instrumental justification for every step. The distinction between sincerity and instrumentality may be, as the framework suggests, ultimately irrelevant: "Elites can be sincere AND strategic (not cynical necessarily)." What matters for the analysis is the mechanism—belief functioning as infrastructure for elite capture of the state.

Tamkeen: The Systematic Purge and Replacement of State Institutions

The most consequential institutional transformation carried out by the NIF regime was the policy known as "tamkeen"—a term meaning "empowerment" or "entrenchment" that described the systematic purging of the Sudanese state apparatus and its replacement with Islamist loyalists. The scale was staggering: more than 78,000 people were purged from the army, police, and civil administration in the years following the coup. This figure represents not merely a change of government but the wholesale reconstruction of the state in the image of a single ideological faction.

The tamkeen policy targeted every institution that could serve as an independent center of power or a potential check on the regime. In the military, officers suspected of loyalty to the Ansar, the DUP, or any other political tendency were dismissed, detained, or executed. The regime carried out purges and executions in the upper ranks of the army to ensure that the security apparatus was staffed exclusively by Islamist sympathizers. In the judiciary, career judges were replaced by NIF-aligned jurists who would administer Islamic law as the regime interpreted it. Special courts were established with summary jurisdiction that bypassed the regular legal system. In the civil service, experienced administrators were dismissed on the basis of political loyalty tests, and their positions were filled by Brotherhood members regardless of technical competence.

The universities—historically the incubator of Sudanese opposition movements—were subjected to particular attention. Faculty who dissented were dismissed. Curricula were Islamized. Student organizations were reorganized under NIF control. The goal was not merely to suppress dissent but to reshape the intellectual infrastructure of the country so that future generations would be educated within an Islamist framework, producing the

next generation of loyal administrators, judges, and military officers without the regime needing to repeat the expensive process of purging and replacing.

This institutional transformation illustrates the framework's analysis of how legal and institutional structures "encode elite advantages." The tamkeen policy created a state in which every significant institution—the military, the judiciary, the civil service, the educational system, the financial sector—was staffed by individuals whose careers, incomes, and social positions depended on the continuation of the Islamist regime. This created a self-reinforcing system: the institutions legitimated the regime, the regime staffed the institutions with loyalists, and the loyalists had material interests in preventing any challenge to the arrangement. The belief system—Islam as interpreted by the NIF—provided the narrative framework that made this institutional capture appear not as what it was (a political faction seizing the state for its own benefit) but as what the regime claimed it to be (the implementation of God's law through righteous governance).

The Legal Framework of Islamic Governance

The NIF regime formalized its institutional capture through a series of legal instruments that embedded Islamist governance in Sudan's constitutional and statutory structure. In January 1991, Bashir decreed that Islamic law would be applied in courts throughout the north, though nominally not in the south. The 1998 constitution, drafted under al-Turabi's supervision and passed through a referendum of dubious integrity (the government claimed 96.7 percent approval with 91.9 percent participation, figures that were widely ridiculed), specified that Sharia and custom were "the sources of legislation."

The legal architecture served multiple functions simultaneously. At one level, it provided the procedural framework for the regime's "Civilization Project"—its plan to transform Sudanese society according to Islamist principles. Public Order Courts enforced morality codes governing dress, behavior, gender mixing, and alcohol consumption. The Popular Police, a paramilitary force of Islamist volunteers, patrolled neighborhoods to ensure compliance. Women were classified as legal minors whose testimony was worth half that of a man's in court; they required male guardian permission to travel; and hundreds were dismissed from supervisory positions in the civil service under the principle that women could not hold authority over men.

At another level, the legal framework served as a mechanism of political control. Sedition laws, apostasy provisions, and emergency regulations gave the state virtually unlimited power to detain, prosecute, and silence opponents. The legal apparatus that had been used to execute Mahmoud Mohammed Taha in 1985 was expanded and institutionalized. Any challenge to the regime could be framed as a challenge to Islam, and any challenge to Islam could be punished with the full severity of Sharia-derived criminal law. This conflation of political dissent with religious heresy is precisely what the framework predicts when it describes how appropriated belief systems create "internalized control mechanisms that make complex societies governable without constant coercion." Citizens did not merely fear the regime's security apparatus; many had internalized the

belief that opposing the Islamic state was morally wrong, spiritually dangerous, and religiously prohibited.

The legal framework also created the institutional basis for wealth extraction, which will be examined in detail in the next section. Islamic banking regulations, zakat collection systems, land tenure laws, and the financial architecture of NIF-connected organizations all operated within a legal structure that gave them the appearance of Islamic legitimacy while functioning as mechanisms for channeling resources toward the ruling elite. The law did not merely reflect power; it constituted the infrastructure through which power operated and through which extraction was legitimated.

The Turabi-Bashir Split: When the Ruler Defeats the Priesthood

The framework identifies a recurring pattern across civilizations: the conflict between the ruler who wields temporal power and the priesthood or interpretive class that controls the legitimating narrative. This "Ruler vs. Priesthood" dynamic played out in Sudan with striking fidelity to the pattern, and its resolution—Bashir's victory over al-Turabi—reveals important insights about the material foundations of elite power.

Throughout the 1990s, al-Turabi served as what observers called "the power behind the throne." He ran a shadow state in which senior Islamists who were not part of the military formulated policy and monitored their counterparts in state institutions. As speaker of the National Assembly after 1996, he wielded legislative power and positioned himself as the regime's ideological guardian. He internationalized the Islamist project by establishing the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress, hosting Osama bin Laden in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, forging alliances with Iran, and providing support to Islamist movements across the region.

But al-Turabi's power, however substantial, ultimately rested on ideological authority rather than military control. When he attempted in 1998 to formalize his position by creating a prime ministerial post that would reduce Bashir's powers and removing Bashir's ability to appoint provincial governors, Bashir responded with the tools that the framework identifies as decisive: material force. In December 1999, Bashir dissolved parliament, declared a state of emergency, and purged al-Turabi and his loyalists from the party and the government. Al-Turabi was imprisoned. His supporters were marginalized. The NIF was reconstituted as the National Congress Party under Bashir's direct control.

The framework predicts this outcome. When rulers control the military and the treasury, they can defeat the interpretive class unless the interpretive class has independent material resources or can mobilize the population against the ruler. Al-Turabi had neither. His power base was organizational and ideological—the Brotherhood's networks, the international connections, the intellectual prestige. But he did not command troops, and the mass of the Sudanese population, though Muslim, had no more loyalty to al-Turabi personally than they had to Bashir. The belief system—Islam—continued to legitimate the

state regardless of which individual controlled it. Bashir simply appropriated the Islamic narrative that al-Turabi had built and continued to rule in its name, jettisoning the ideologue while keeping the ideology.

This split had two significant consequences. First, it confirmed that the Islamic governance project in Sudan was not driven by religious conviction at the elite level but by the material interests of whoever controlled the state apparatus. When Bashir and al-Turabi's interests diverged, it was military power, not theological authority, that determined the outcome. Second, it transformed the NCP from an ideologically driven party into a patronage-based vehicle for Bashir's personal rule. The "pragmatists" displaced the "ideologues," and the Islamic veneer became increasingly thin as the regime devoted itself to self-enrichment and power preservation. Yet the narrative persisted because it continued to serve the function the framework identifies: legitimating extraction by making the regime's authority appear divinely sanctioned rather than merely coercive.

IV. WEALTH EXTRACTION MECHANISMS: OIL, LAND, AND THE MATERIAL LOGIC OF ISLAMIZATION

Oil: The Material Prize Behind the Narrative

The discovery and exploitation of oil in Sudan reveals the material logic underlying the entire Islamization project with a clarity that leaves little room for alternative interpretation. The framework insists that belief systems function as "infrastructure for extraction"—that the narrative exists, in its political function, to legitimate the channeling of resources from the many to the few. In Sudan, the resource was oil, and the belief system—Islamic governance—functioned to legitimate the northern elite's control of petroleum wealth located primarily in the territories of southern and marginalized populations.

Chevron discovered commercially viable oil deposits in southern Sudan in 1978, with major finds at Bentiu (later renamed Unity) and Heglig along the northern fringe of Bahr al-Ghazal province. The geography was immediately consequential: the oil lay in territories inhabited by Nuer and Dinka populations whose cultural identity was emphatically not Arab and not Muslim, in a region that had been granted regional autonomy under the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. For the Khartoum government, exploiting these resources required either maintaining the cooperative relationship with the south established by the agreement or asserting direct central control over the oil-producing regions.

The timing of Nimeiry's key decisions in 1983 reveals the material calculations underlying his Islamic turn. In June 1983—three months before the September

Laws—Nimeiry redivided the Southern Region into three smaller provinces, dissolving the regional government that had been established by the Addis Ababa Agreement. This administrative act, which directly violated the terms of the peace agreement, was designed to weaken southern political cohesion and facilitate central control over the oil-producing areas. The creation of "Unity Province" specifically excluded oil regions from southern control and incorporated them into the north's administrative structure.

The September Laws followed in September, imposing Sharia across the entire country including the predominantly non-Muslim south. The conventional narrative presents these as separate decisions—one administrative, one religious. The framework's analysis reveals them as complementary elements of a single strategy: the administrative restructuring seized control of the oil regions, while the Islamic framework provided the legitimating narrative for northern dominance over a unified state in which Islamic law applied to all citizens regardless of their faith. The southern response was immediate and violent: Colonel John Garang formed the Sudan People's Liberation Army in 1983, launching attacks that targeted oil infrastructure specifically. Guerrilla attacks on Chevron workers in February 1984 brought oil exploration to a halt. The war that the September Laws helped provoke destroyed the very economic asset they were partly designed to control.

This dynamic—religious narrative deployed to legitimate resource extraction, producing resistance that makes extraction impossible—illustrates a pattern the framework recognizes: the costs of defending appropriated narratives can exceed the benefits when the material stakes are high enough to provoke sustained armed resistance. For Nimeiry, the calculation failed immediately; he was overthrown in 1985 without having realized any oil revenue. But for his successors, the calculation persisted because the material prize remained: estimated proven reserves of 5 billion barrels, with 75 percent located in the south.

The Bashir Regime's Oil Economy: Extraction Under Islamic Cover

Under the Bashir regime, the material function of Islamic governance in relation to oil became increasingly explicit. After Chevron suspended operations in 1984 and ultimately withdrew from Sudan in 1992 under U.S. pressure, the regime turned to Asian oil companies—primarily China's CNPC, Malaysia's Petronas, and India's ONGC—that were less susceptible to Western human rights advocacy. Sudan began exporting oil in 1999, and within a few years, petroleum had transformed the regime's financial position. Oil revenues soared from negligible levels to billions of dollars annually, fundamentally altering the political economy of the state.

The regime's handling of oil revenue demonstrated the framework's analysis of wealth extraction with textbook precision. Revenues were channeled through opaque state-controlled entities with minimal transparency or accountability. The security and intelligence apparatus received disproportionate allocations. The military budget expanded enormously, funding the prosecution of the war in the south and later in

Darfur. NIF-connected individuals and companies received preferential access to contracts, import licenses, and financial services. Bashir's own family members accumulated enormous wealth: his brothers controlled the cement industry and held majority shares in firms owning stakes in over twenty of the country's largest subsidiaries. Top leaders of the ruling NCP controlled at least 164 companies.

A leaked diplomatic cable alleged that Bashir personally embezzled nearly $9 billion in Sudanese oil revenues—a figure that, if accurate, represents one of the largest cases of sovereign wealth theft in modern African history. International investigators characterized the system as a "violent kleptocracy" in which "a small ruling group maintains power indefinitely through various forms of corruption and violence." The Enough Project's detailed investigation concluded that "a relatively small group of regime insiders, supported by domestic and foreign commercial partners, have captured and distorted key sectors of the Sudanese economy much more successfully than previous governments."

The Islamic legitimating narrative served this extraction in several ways. First, it provided the ideological justification for centralizing power in Khartoum: the Islamic state's authority was divine in origin, and therefore challenges to its control over national resources (including southern oil) were challenges to God's order. Second, it created institutional mechanisms—Islamic banking, zakat collection, religiously-motivated charitable organizations—that functioned as parallel financial systems through which regime loyalists could accumulate wealth outside conventional regulatory oversight. The NIF established hundreds of organizations that received tax and customs exemptions and served as "vehicles for accumulating shares in privatised public bodies." Third, it provided the narrative framework for the war against the south: the regime declared the conflict a jihad in 1992, transforming what was transparently a resource war into a religious obligation that mobilized northern populations and legitimated the extreme violence—including ethnic cleansing, deliberate starvation, and the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian populations—that the regime deployed to maintain access to the oil fields.

Land: The Quiet Extraction

While oil attracted international attention, land represented an equally significant mechanism of elite extraction, and one that was even more directly enabled by the legal and institutional framework of Islamic governance. The framework emphasizes that wealth extraction mechanisms often operate through legal structures that appear neutral but systematically advantage elites, and Sudan's land tenure system provides a precise illustration.

Under the Unregistered Land Act of 1970 and the Civil Transaction Act of 1984, the state claimed ownership of all unregistered land. In a country where customary land tenure was the norm and formal registration was rare—due to limited public awareness, practical barriers, and the strength of traditional practices—this meant that the

government effectively owned approximately 90 percent of Sudan's land. Under the Bashir regime, this legal framework was weaponized as a tool of political patronage. Vast tracts of agricultural, pastoral, and resource-rich land were transferred to politically connected individuals and regime-linked companies, displacing communities that had occupied and cultivated these lands for generations.

This dispossession was legitimated through the same Islamic governance framework that justified every other aspect of the regime's rule. The state's authority derived from divine mandate; its laws reflected Islamic principles; challenges to its decisions were challenges to the divinely ordained order. Populations whose lands were seized had no effective legal recourse because the judiciary had been captured through tamkeen, the security forces enforced compliance through violence, and the Islamic narrative framework made resistance appear not merely futile but spiritually transgressive.

In Darfur, land dispossession operated alongside the more visible violence of the war that erupted in 2003. Arab pastoralist militias (the Janjaweed), supported by the regime, attacked African farming communities and seized their lands. The regime's justification drew on Arab-Islamic supremacist narratives that had been part of the Islamist state's ideological architecture: the Islamic state served the Arab-Muslim identity of Sudan, and African populations who challenged that identity—whether in the south or in the west—could be legitimately suppressed. The International Criminal Court eventually charged Bashir with genocide for the Darfur violence, but the structural logic of the extraction—land and resources flowing from marginalized populations to regime-connected elites under the cover of Islamic and Arab identity—was consistent with the pattern the framework identifies across civilizations.

The Tax Structure: Zakat as Parallel Revenue System

The zakat system introduced as part of the Islamization process deserves specific attention as a wealth extraction mechanism. Zakat—the obligatory charitable tax constituting one of the Five Pillars of Islam—was transformed under the Sudanese Islamist state from a religious obligation administered through traditional community structures into a state-controlled revenue system that created a parallel taxation apparatus.

The framework's analysis of how belief systems "legitimate extraction" is directly applicable. Unlike a secular tax, which citizens may resent and resist, zakat carries the weight of divine command. Muslims believe that paying zakat is a religious obligation; failure to pay is not merely illegal but sinful. By capturing the administration of zakat through state institutions staffed by NIF loyalists, the regime acquired a revenue stream that was simultaneously enforced by religious conviction and controlled by political power. Citizens were not merely paying taxes to a government they might oppose; they were fulfilling a sacred duty that happened to be collected and distributed by the very elite faction that had captured the state.

Nimeiry had claimed that the zakat and taxation law demonstrated Sudan's economic prosperity and benefited both the poor and non-Muslims. The reality was that the zakat system created opportunities for diversion, corruption, and patronage distribution that operated alongside the formal budget. The absence of independent oversight, the conflation of religious and state authority, and the moral impossibility of questioning the administration of a sacred obligation all combined to make zakat collection a particularly effective extraction mechanism—one that was available only because the regime had appropriated the Islamic belief system and fused it with state power.

V. INFORMATION CONTROL: THE MACHINERY OF ISLAMIC CONSENSUS

The Destruction of Independent Media and Civil Society

The NIF regime's approach to information control followed logically from its institutional strategy: just as every state institution was purged and restaffed, every channel of independent information was suppressed and replaced with regime-controlled alternatives. The framework identifies information control as the mechanism by which elites "maintain popular support and limit dissent," and the Sudanese regime pursued both objectives with systematic thoroughness.

Immediately following the 1989 coup, the regime banned all independent newspapers, dissolved trade unions and professional associations, and prohibited political parties and "nonreligious institutions." The dissolution of the Bar Association and its reconstitution under NIF leadership was emblematic: an institution that might have provided legal resistance to the regime was captured, its elections manipulated to ensure pro-government control, while mandatory membership ensured that every practicing lawyer was incorporated into a regime-controlled structure. Similar processes played out across professional associations, student unions, women's organizations, and community groups.

The regime replaced this destroyed landscape with its own institutional network. NIF-connected organizations received tax and customs exemptions while independent groups faced legal restrictions under the 1994 Societies Registration Act. The result was not the absence of civil society but its replacement with a managed civic space in which every organization operated within parameters defined by the Islamic state. This is precisely the mechanism the framework describes as "information control through institutional capture"—not censorship alone, but the construction of an alternative information ecosystem in which the regime's narrative is the only one available.

Media control evolved over time from crude suppression to more sophisticated management. In the early years, the regime simply shut down publications and

imprisoned journalists. By the mid-1990s, a controlled opening allowed some private newspapers to operate, but under tight surveillance and subject to closure for publishing content deemed harmful to "national security and social stability." Pro-NIF publications were simultaneously launched, creating the appearance of media pluralism within a tightly managed information environment. Foreign journalists required government visas and were closely monitored. The government regularly accused Western media of "anti-Sudan and anti-Islam bias," using the Islamic legitimating narrative to discredit external information sources.

The Educational Apparatus: Producing the Next Generation of Believers

The educational system represented the regime's most ambitious and consequential information control mechanism, and one that illustrates the framework's analysis of how belief systems are transmitted across generations to ensure the self-perpetuating character of elite power.

The Islamization of education extended from primary schools through universities. Curricula were revised to reflect the regime's Islamic ideology. Arabic was imposed as the medium of instruction even in regions where it was not the local language, displacing English and southern Sudanese languages. The khalwa (Quranic school) system was expanded and integrated with the state educational infrastructure. University admissions were influenced by political loyalty, and Islamic studies became a more prominent component of all degree programs.

The goal was not merely to suppress dissenting information but to produce a generation of Sudanese citizens who had been educated entirely within the Islamic state's interpretive framework. A student who entered primary school in 1990 and graduated from university in 2006 would have received sixteen years of education shaped by the regime's ideology. They would have learned that Islamic governance was the natural and proper form of political organization, that the regime's policies reflected divine will, that the war in the south was a jihad against enemies of Islam, and that challenges to the state were challenges to the faith. The framework identifies this as the mechanism by which "generational transmission" converts appropriated belief into internalized conviction: "Children taught belief from birth... Life-cycle ceremonies embed... Belief becomes 'just how things are.'"

The effectiveness of this strategy is demonstrated by the persistence of Islamist sentiment in northern Sudan even after the 2019 revolution that overthrew Bashir. Three decades of institutional Islamization produced constituencies—particularly among those educated entirely under the regime—for whom Islamic governance was not an imposed ideology but simply the way Sudan should be governed. This is exactly the process the framework describes: what begins as strategic appropriation by elites becomes, through generational transmission, genuinely held belief that persists even when the specific elites who initiated the appropriation have been removed from power.

The Jihad Narrative: Reframing Resource Wars as Religious Obligation

The most consequential exercise in information control was the regime's declaration in 1992 that the war against the southern SPLA was a jihad—a holy war that imposed religious obligation on all Muslims to support the state's military campaign. This narrative transformation took what was transparently a war over resources, territory, and political control and reframed it as a cosmic struggle between Islam and its enemies.

The jihad declaration served multiple functions simultaneously. It mobilized northern populations for military service by attaching religious merit to participation. It delegitimated the SPLA and southern populations by casting them as enemies of God. It justified the extreme violence deployed against southern civilians—including forced displacement, deliberate famine, and the bombing of civilian targets—by framing these acts as necessities of religious warfare rather than war crimes. And it created an international framework by connecting Sudan's internal conflict to the broader narrative of Islamic resistance to Western and Christian imperialism.

The ulamaa (religious scholars) who endorsed the jihad declaration in 1992 issued a fatwa stating that "an insurgent who was previously a Muslim is now an apostate, and a non-Muslim is a non-believer standing as a bulwark against the spread of Islam; Islam has granted the license to kill both of them." This religious ruling effectively provided theological sanction for the killing of any opponent of the regime, Muslim or non-Muslim, by framing opposition as apostasy or unbelief. The framework's analysis of suppression applies directly: the shared Islamic narrative was being used to justify the elimination of challenges to elite control, with the interpretive class (the co-opted ulamaa) providing the religious authorization that the regime needed to maintain the appearance of acting within Islamic law.

The effectiveness of the jihad narrative in mobilizing support for the war demonstrates the framework's central insight about the force-multiplying power of belief. A secular government fighting an unpopular resource war would have struggled to maintain public support for a conflict that consumed lives and resources with no end in sight. By framing the war as a jihad, the regime transformed a military obligation into a spiritual duty. Young men who might have resisted conscription into a pointless war volunteered for what they believed was a defense of Islam. Families who might have protested the deaths of their sons accepted their losses as martyrdom. Communities that bore the economic costs of the war understood their sacrifices as investments in divine favor. The belief system did not merely legitimate the extraction—it actively produced the compliance and enthusiasm that made the extraction possible.

Yet the jihad narrative also imposed costs that the framework would predict. By framing the conflict in religious terms, the regime made compromise with the south far more difficult. A government fighting a resource war can negotiate a settlement that divides the spoils; a government fighting a holy war cannot concede territory to the enemies of God without appearing to betray the faith. The Islamic narrative that made mobilization

easier made peace harder, extending the conflict for decades and ultimately contributing to the conditions that produced South Sudan's secession—the permanent loss of the very resources that the narrative had been designed to control.

The Sufi Counter-Narrative: What the Regime Could Not Control

Despite the regime's comprehensive information control apparatus, one element of the Sudanese Islamic landscape proved resistant to complete capture: the traditional Sufi orders that had constituted the primary expression of Islamic identity in Sudan for centuries before the Brotherhood arrived.

The Ansar, the Khatmiyya, and numerous smaller Sufi tariqas maintained their own networks of teachers, shrines, rituals, and communal gatherings that operated partially outside the regime's control. The NIF's version of Islam—modernist, legalistic, focused on state implementation of Sharia—was alien to the devotional, mystical, and saint-centered Sufi tradition that most ordinary northern Sudanese had inherited from their families. Many Sufi leaders viewed the NIF's Islam as a foreign import—influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Gulf Salafism—that had little to do with the lived religious experience of Sudanese communities.

This tension between the appropriated Islam of the state and the embedded Islam of the Sufi orders created a space for dissent that was simultaneously religious and political. Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Ansar, continued to articulate an alternative Islamic political vision from exile and later from within Sudan. The DUP's Khatmiyya base maintained its own religious infrastructure. Smaller Sufi orders provided community solidarity that was not mediated by the state.

The framework predicts exactly this dynamic: when an elite captures and modifies a belief system, communities that maintain alternative interpretive traditions become potential sites of resistance. The NIF could purge the civil service and close newspapers, but it could not easily dismantle Sufi shrines that had existed for centuries or silence spiritual teachers whose authority derived not from state appointment but from chains of religious transmission stretching back generations. The Sufi counter-narrative was not revolutionary—it did not produce armed resistance or mass protests during the regime's period of greatest strength—but it preserved an alternative understanding of what Islam could mean in Sudan, one that would re-emerge when the regime's power began to wane.

This is Part 2 of 4 in "Sudan's Islamic Turn: Elite Appropriation of Belief and the Fracturing of a Nation (1956–2011)."

Part 3 will examine Resistance and Suppression (the SPLA war, the southern experience, the Darfur catastrophe), Elite Network Coordination (the NIF's domestic and international networks, the role of Gulf financing, the military-Islamist complex), and the regime's

management of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ultimately led to South Sudan's independence. It will apply the framework's Five Conditions for Successful Suppression to explain why the regime's attempt to eliminate southern resistance failed despite decades of devastating violence.

Sudan's Islamic Turn: Elite Appropriation of Belief and the Fracturing of a Nation (1956–2011)

Part 3 of 4

VI. RESISTANCE AND SUPPRESSION: THE WARS THAT BELIEF COULD NOT WIN

The SPLA and the Limits of Narrative Control

The framework identifies resistance and suppression as the arena in which the durability of appropriated belief systems is tested against material reality. In Sudan, the most consequential test came not from intellectual dissent or political opposition within the north—those had been effectively crushed through tamkeen, the execution of Taha, and the comprehensive destruction of independent civil society—but from the armed resistance of populations who did not share the appropriated belief and therefore could not be controlled through its mechanisms.

The Sudan People's Liberation Army was founded in 1983 in direct response to Nimeiry's twin provocations: the administrative dissolution of the Southern Region and the imposition of Islamic law. When soldiers of Battalion 105 mutinied at Bor on May 16, 1983, refusing orders to transfer to northern garrisons, they initiated what would become one of the longest and most devastating civil wars in modern African history—twenty-two years of conflict that killed over two million people, displaced four million, and ultimately fractured the state that the Islamic narrative was designed to hold together. The mutiny's timing, just months before the September Laws, underscores the framework's insight about the relationship between narrative construction and material resistance: the populations most directly threatened by the appropriation of belief as state ideology were also those with the least reason to accept the narrative's legitimacy.

Colonel John Garang de Mabior, who assumed leadership of the SPLA after joining the mutineers rather than suppressing them as he had been ordered to do, embodied a resistance philosophy that posed a particular challenge to the regime's narrative framework. Garang was not a simple separatist demanding southern independence—at least not initially. He was a developmental economist with a doctorate from Iowa State University who articulated a vision of "New Sudan": a secular, democratic, united state in

which all citizens would enjoy equal rights regardless of religion or ethnicity. This vision was threatening to the Islamic state precisely because it did not reject the north or demonize Islam; it proposed an alternative organizing principle for Sudanese national identity that would strip the regime of its primary legitimating tool. If Sudan could be governed as a secular democracy, the entire apparatus of Islamic governance—the Sharia courts, the Public Order Police, the zakat collection system, the jihad narrative, the tamkeen purges—would lose its justification.

The regime's response illuminates the framework's analysis of what happens when elite belief strategies encounter populations that cannot be persuaded. Where the northern population could be mobilized through the Islamic narrative—volunteering for jihad, accepting austerity as spiritual discipline, internalizing the regime's authority as divine mandate—the southern population required raw coercion. The regime could not convince Dinka and Nuer communities that Islamic law represented their authentic cultural identity, could not mobilize them through appeals to Islamic solidarity, could not use the mosque network to transmit compliance. The force-multiplying effect of belief, which the framework estimates at 50 to 100 times the efficiency of coercion alone, simply did not operate in the south. Every unit of control in the southern territories had to be purchased with actual violence, actual military deployment, actual expenditure of blood and treasure.

The cost differential was staggering. In the north, the regime maintained control over a population of roughly twenty-five million through a combination of institutional capture, information control, and genuine belief, requiring relatively modest security expenditure beyond the initial tamkeen purges. In the south, controlling a population of roughly eight million required decades of continuous warfare, the deployment of regular army forces, the arming of tribal militias, the use of aerial bombardment against civilian targets, the deliberate engineering of famine, and ultimately an international paramilitary infrastructure that consumed an enormous share of state revenue. This asymmetry is precisely what the framework predicts: without belief as infrastructure, the arithmetic of control reverts to the brutal ratios of pure coercion, and those ratios are economically unsustainable over the long term.

The Five Conditions Applied: Why Southern Suppression Failed

The framework specifies five conditions that must be met simultaneously for the successful suppression of a belief system or resistant population: unified elite commitment, geographic containment, target vulnerability, overwhelming force applied, and multi-generational persistence. The Sudanese regime's attempt to impose Islamic governance on the south failed because it could not satisfy several of these conditions, and the analysis of which conditions failed—and why—reveals the structural limitations of belief-based power when it confronts populations outside the belief's domain.

The first condition—unified elite commitment to suppression—was partially met but never complete. The northern elite was broadly unified in its desire to control southern

resources, but fissures existed throughout the period. The Turabi-Bashir split in 1999 divided the regime's leadership at a critical moment. The traditional parties—the Umma and the DUP—had complex relationships with the southern question, and Sadiq al-Mahdi's government had actively pursued peace negotiations with the SPLA in the late 1980s before the NIF coup preempted a potential settlement. Even within the NIF regime, pragmatists who recognized the war's economic costs competed with ideologues who viewed the conflict through a genuinely religious lens. The National Democratic Alliance, formed in exile, eventually brought together the SPLA with northern opposition parties including the Umma Party, the DUP, and even Turabi's breakaway Popular Congress Party—a coalition that demonstrated the elite was far from unified in its approach to the south.

The second condition—geographic containment—was never achievable. Southern Sudan constituted roughly a third of Africa's largest country, an area of nearly 250,000 square miles of swamp, savanna, and tropical forest traversed by the Nile and its tributaries. The terrain was ideally suited to guerrilla warfare and utterly hostile to the conventional military operations at which the Sudanese armed forces were nominally proficient. More critically, the SPLA maintained external sanctuaries and supply lines that the regime could not sever. Ethiopia under the Derg provided training camps, weapons, and logistical support from 1983 until the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991. When that sanctuary was lost—producing a crisis that nearly destroyed the SPLA and triggered the catastrophic 1991 split between Garang and Riek Machar—Uganda, Eritrea, and other regional powers stepped in to provide alternative support. The geographic vastness of the conflict zone and the permeability of international borders meant that the regime could never achieve the containment that successful suppression requires.

The third condition—target vulnerability—was partially present but diminished over time. The southern population was indeed fragmented along ethnic lines, divided between Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, and dozens of smaller groups whose historical rivalries the regime systematically exploited. The 1991 SPLA split was catastrophic: Riek Machar and Lam Akol's breakaway "SPLA-Nasir" faction triggered internecine warfare that killed thousands of southern civilians, particularly in the Bor massacre, and the regime skillfully recruited dissident factions into proxy militias through the 1997 Khartoum Peace Agreement. The government's strategy of arming one southern group against another—the murahileen Arab militias against Dinka communities, Nuer factions against Garang's predominantly Dinka forces—inflicted enormous suffering and repeatedly threatened to fragment the southern resistance entirely. Yet the SPLA survived these divisions. Garang's authoritarian leadership style, while brutal toward internal dissent, maintained organizational coherence through the darkest periods. By the mid-1990s, the SPLA had rebuilt its capacity with Ugandan and Eritrean support, and the fundamental unity of southern opposition to Islamic governance—whatever the internal divisions over leadership and strategy—proved more durable than the regime's efforts to exploit them.

The fourth condition—overwhelming force applied—was attempted but never achieved at the necessary scale. The regime deployed considerable violence: aerial bombardment of

civilian targets, deliberate destruction of food supplies to engineer famine, forced displacement of populations from oil-producing regions, the use of slave raids and abductions as instruments of terror, and the systematic deployment of the murahileen militias that foreshadowed the Janjaweed campaign in Darfur. The suffering was immense—over two million dead, four million displaced, countless communities destroyed. Yet this violence, however devastating, never reached the threshold of total infrastructure destruction that the framework identifies as necessary for successful suppression. The SPLA maintained its military capacity, its command structure (however fractured), its political organization, and its external support networks throughout the conflict. The regime could devastate southern communities but could not eliminate the southern resistance, because the geographic scale of the conflict, the terrain, and the external support made total suppression impossible without resources the regime did not possess.

The fifth condition—multi-generational persistence—was tested but ultimately found wanting. The regime prosecuted the war for over two decades, a period that in principle might have been sufficient to break southern resistance through sheer attrition. But the war's costs mounted relentlessly. Military expenditure consumed resources that might have consolidated the regime's northern base. International sanctions, imposed after the regime's association with international terrorism and its human rights record attracted Western attention, further constrained its capacity. The September 11 attacks in 2001, paradoxically, increased international pressure for a settlement: the United States, seeking Sudanese intelligence cooperation against al-Qaeda networks the regime itself had hosted, used the leverage to push toward negotiations. By the early 2000s, the regime had concluded that the costs of continued warfare exceeded the benefits—not because the Islamic narrative had lost its mobilizing power in the north, but because the material resources required to sustain suppression in the south were undermining the regime's capacity to maintain control everywhere else.

The framework's prediction is confirmed: when all five conditions cannot be met simultaneously, suppression fails. The Sudanese regime possessed a unified narrative, considerable military force, and willingness to sustain the effort across decades. But it could not contain the resistance geographically, could not render the target sufficiently vulnerable, and could not apply the overwhelming total force required for elimination. The result was not the suppression of southern resistance but the eventual acknowledgment, through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, that the Islamic state's writ could not extend over populations who did not share the belief that legitimated it.

Darfur: When the Narrative Consumes Its Own

If the southern war demonstrated the limits of Islamic governance as a tool for controlling non-Muslim populations, the Darfur catastrophe that erupted in 2003 revealed something the framework considers equally significant: the capacity of appropriated belief systems to generate violence against populations who nominally share the faith but challenge the elite's control of its interpretation and the resources it legitimates.

The populations of Darfur were overwhelmingly Muslim. The Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa communities who became the primary targets of the regime's counterinsurgency campaign prayed in mosques, observed Ramadan, and identified themselves as members of the Islamic umma. They were not Christians, animists, or secularists who could be straightforwardly excluded from the Islamic narrative. Their grievance was not with Islam but with the Arab-dominated Khartoum elite's monopoly on power and resources—the same grievance that had animated southern resistance, but expressed by communities who shared the regime's religion if not its ethnicity or its interpretation of what Islamic governance should mean in practice.

When the Sudan Liberation Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement launched attacks on government installations in February 2003, demanding an end to economic marginalization and political exclusion, the regime responded with a counterinsurgency strategy that revealed the intersection of Islamic narrative and ethnic supremacism that had always underlain the NIF project. The army, still recovering from its long and inconclusive war in the south, was incapable of defeating the Darfuri rebels through conventional military operations—the rebels won thirty-four of thirty-eight engagements in the middle months of 2003, destroying a battalion at Kutum and threatening to extend the war into Kordofan. The regime turned instead to the Janjaweed, Arab nomad militias whose members were drawn primarily from the Abbala and Baggara herding communities, and unleashed them against the African farming populations of Darfur in a campaign that the United States government formally characterized as genocide.

The pattern of violence was systematic: government air forces would bomb civilian settlements with helicopter gunships and Antonov aircraft; the Janjaweed would then sweep through on horseback and in vehicles, killing men, raping women, abducting children, burning villages, poisoning wells, destroying food stocks, and seizing livestock and other assets. Between 2003 and 2008, this campaign killed approximately 300,000 people and displaced 2.7 million. The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for President Bashir on charges of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity—making him the first sitting head of state to face such charges.

The framework's analysis illuminates the Darfur catastrophe from several angles. First, the ethnic dimension of the violence reveals that the Islamic narrative, while serving as the regime's primary legitimating tool, was layered upon an older and in some ways more fundamental narrative of Arab supremacy. The NIF's "Civilization Project" had always contained an Arab-Islamic identity claim that marginalized African Muslims as much as it marginalized non-Muslims. In Darfur, where the distinction between "Arab" and "African" was more a matter of livelihood and self-identification than genetics—the communities shared religion, language, and centuries of intermarriage—the regime weaponized ethnic categories to justify the dispossession of African farming communities in favor of Arab pastoralist allies. The Islamic narrative provided the overarching legitimation, but the operational logic was land seizure: the transfer of territory from communities the regime classified as ethnically subordinate to communities it classified as ethnically allied.

Second, the Darfur violence demonstrates the framework's insight about the costs of defending appropriated narratives through force. The jihad declaration of 1992 had framed the southern war as a religious struggle against non-Muslims, a narrative that, however dishonest, at least possessed internal coherence: Muslims fighting non-Muslims in defense of the Islamic state. In Darfur, this narrative collapsed. The regime could not declare jihad against fellow Muslims without exposing the ethnic rather than religious character of its project. Instead, it relied on a combination of Arab supremacist ideology, counterinsurgency euphemism, and denial—claiming that the violence was an "inter-tribal" conflict in which the government was merely maintaining order. This narrative was far less effective than the jihad framing, both domestically and internationally, because it lacked the mobilizing power of religious obligation. The regime could arm the Janjaweed, but it could not attach the spiritual rewards of jihad to the killing of fellow Muslims, and the resulting violence was therefore experienced even by many northern Sudanese as state criminality rather than sacred duty.

Third, and perhaps most important for the framework's broader argument, Darfur revealed the ultimately self-consuming character of the Islamist project. The regime had constructed an elaborate infrastructure of belief—Islamic governance, Sharia law, jihad narratives, tamkeen—to legitimate the extraction of resources by a northern Arab elite. But the logic of extraction, once established, did not confine itself to non-Muslim populations. The same mechanisms of state violence, ethnic mobilization, and resource seizure that had been deployed against the south were turned against Muslim populations in the west when those populations challenged the elite's monopoly on power and wealth. The belief system that was supposed to provide the inclusive framework holding the Islamic state together proved incapable of preventing the elite from consuming its own nominal constituency when material interests demanded it.

The International Criminal Court's indictment of Bashir, announced in 2008 with formal charges of genocide issued in 2010, represented the international community's belated recognition that the Sudanese Islamic state was not what its narrative claimed to be—a government implementing divine law for the benefit of the faithful—but what the framework argues all such arrangements ultimately are: an elite extraction mechanism using belief as infrastructure, capable of turning its instruments of control against any population, including believers, when the material logic of extraction requires it.

VII. ELITE NETWORK COORDINATION: THE ARCHITECTURE OF ISLAMIST POWER

The NIF as Organizational Machine

The framework identifies elite network coordination as the mechanism by which "diverse elite factions maintain cohesion and coordinate action despite diverse interests." The National Islamic Front, and the broader Brotherhood movement from which it emerged, represented one of the most sophisticated examples of elite coordination in modern African and Middle Eastern politics—a network that combined ideological commitment with institutional penetration, financial engineering, and international alliance-building to create a self-reinforcing system of power that proved remarkably durable even as its leadership fractured and its narrative lost credibility.

The foundation of NIF coordination was organizational discipline inherited from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood model. From the 1940s onward, the Sudanese Brotherhood operated as a cadre organization rather than a mass movement. Its recruitment was concentrated among university students and educated professionals—lawyers, doctors, engineers, bankers—who were trained not merely in Islamic theology but in organizational technique, strategic planning, and institutional infiltration. Al-Turabi's genius was recognizing that the Brotherhood's comparative advantage lay not in popular mobilization, where it could never compete with the Ansar or the Khatmiyya, but in elite placement: putting the right people in the right positions across the state apparatus and the private economy, creating a network of loyalists who could be activated for coordinated action when the moment arrived.

This organizational strategy produced what scholars of the period have described as a "shadow state" operating alongside and ultimately within the formal institutions of Sudanese governance. During the reconciliation period from 1977 to 1985, when Nimeiry allowed the Brotherhood back into public life in exchange for political support, Brotherhood members were systematically placed in the judiciary, the civil service, the military intelligence apparatus, and the financial sector. The Faisal Islamic Bank, opened in Sudan in 1977 with sixty percent Saudi startup capital, and the Al Baraka Bank, established shortly thereafter, functioned not merely as financial institutions but as patronage networks that rewarded Brotherhood affiliates with employment, credit, and investment opportunities. By the time of the 1989 coup, the NIF possessed what no other Sudanese political faction could claim: a disciplined network of loyalists embedded in every significant institution, with independent financial resources, coherent ideology, and a leadership prepared to coordinate their activation for the seizure of state power.

The post-coup consolidation deepened this coordination through tamkeen. The 78,000 purged state employees were replaced not by random Islamist sympathizers but by Brotherhood members selected through the network's internal processes and placed according to strategic priorities. The result was a state apparatus in which every significant decision node—military command, judicial appointment, financial regulation, educational administration, intelligence operation—was staffed by individuals who owed their positions to the NIF network and who maintained loyalty to it through a combination of ideological conviction, material interest, and mutual surveillance. The "Ghost Houses"—the detention centers run by the intelligence apparatus where opponents were interrogated, tortured, and sometimes killed—served not only to suppress external

dissent but to discipline the network itself, ensuring that members understood the consequences of defection.

The framework's analysis of elite composition applies precisely. The NIF network encompassed the political elite (senior party officials and government ministers), the military elite (officers recruited through Brotherhood networks and promoted through tamkeen), the interpretive class (Islamic scholars, judges, and educators who provided religious legitimation), and the commercial elite (businessmen connected to Islamic banking and NIF-linked companies). These overlapping circles were bound together by shared education (many had attended the same universities, often studied abroad together), shared ideology (however sincerely held), intermarriage among leading families, and mutual material interest in the system's perpetuation. The framework predicts that such multi-layered elite coordination produces exceptional stability—and indeed, the NIF/NCP regime survived for thirty years despite civil war, international sanctions, the ICC indictment of its president, and the loss of a third of its territory through South Sudan's secession.

The International Dimension: Gulf Financing and Global Islamism

The NIF's elite network extended far beyond Sudan's borders, connecting the Sudanese Islamist project to a transnational infrastructure of Gulf financing, international Islamist organizations, and ultimately to the global jihadist networks whose consequences are still being felt.

The financial relationship between the NIF and Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, was foundational to the movement's rise. Saudi Arabia's interest in Sudan was partly strategic—the country lay directly across the Red Sea from the Kingdom, and a friendly Islamist government in Khartoum served Saudi interests in countering both Communist influence and Iranian Shia expansionism in the Horn of Africa. But the relationship was also financial. Saudi capital flowed into Sudan through Islamic banking institutions that served as the Brotherhood's primary economic vehicle. The Faisal Islamic Bank, with its majority Saudi startup capital, became the second-largest bank in Sudan by deposits within a decade of its founding. These institutions provided what al-Turabi's movement needed most: independent financial resources that freed the Brotherhood from dependence on the Sudanese state and allowed it to build the parallel economic infrastructure that sustained its cadres, financed its operations, and ultimately funded its seizure of power.

The broader international dimension of al-Turabi's project was more ambitious and ultimately more costly. Turabi envisioned Khartoum as the headquarters of an international Islamic revolution—a counterpart to Tehran's role in Shia revolutionary politics, but operating within the Sunni world. He established the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress in 1991, an organization that brought together Islamist movements from across the Muslim world and provided a forum for coordination and mutual support. Representatives from Hamas, Hezbollah, and numerous other organizations attended its

conferences. This internationalization of the NIF's project reflected Turabi's understanding that the Islamic narrative, if it was to function as a durable legitimating framework for elite power, needed to be embedded in a transnational infrastructure that would provide resources, legitimacy, and strategic depth beyond what Sudan alone could supply.

The most consequential and ultimately most damaging element of this international strategy was the regime's relationship with Osama bin Laden. In 1991, Turabi invited bin Laden to relocate his operations from Afghanistan to Sudan, welcoming him as what one account described as "the great Islamic investor." Bin Laden poured millions into Sudanese business ventures: his Al-Hijrah construction company built the Tahaddi road linking Khartoum with Port Sudan and a modern airport near Port Sudan; his agricultural companies acquired vast tracts of land; he invested fifty million dollars in Al-Shamal Islamic Bank. These business relationships were symbiotic—bin Laden received safe haven and operational space, while the NIF regime received infrastructure investment and financial resources that supplemented its conventional revenue.

But the relationship also drew Sudan into the infrastructure of global terrorism in ways that ultimately undermined the regime's interests. By 1994, bin Laden was financing at least three terrorist training camps in northern Sudan in cooperation with NIF military intelligence, hosting Egyptian, Algerian, Tunisian, and Palestinian extremists. The 1995 assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, carried out by operatives based in Khartoum, triggered United Nations sanctions and the United States' designation of Sudan as a State Sponsor of Terrorism—a designation that imposed economic costs the regime could ill afford while it was simultaneously prosecuting a devastating civil war. Bin Laden was expelled in 1996 under combined American, Egyptian, and Saudi pressure, relocating to Afghanistan where he planned the embassy bombings of 1998 and ultimately the September 11 attacks.

The framework's analysis of elite network coordination illuminates the strategic logic and the strategic failure of Turabi's internationalization. At one level, the international network served exactly the function the framework identifies: providing external resources (Gulf financing), ideological legitimation (recognition from the global Islamic movement), and strategic depth (alliances with sympathetic governments and movements) that strengthened the domestic elite arrangement. At another level, the international network became a liability that the domestic elite could not control. Turabi's vision of Khartoum as the capital of global Islamic revolution was coherent within his ideological framework but disastrous for the material interests of a regime that depended on oil revenues, international trade, and at least minimal diplomatic respectability. When Bashir moved against Turabi in 1999, one factor in his calculation was that the international dimension of the Islamist project had become an obstacle to the pragmatic pursuit of power and wealth that motivated the regime's military elite. The ideologue's grand vision had to be sacrificed to the ruler's material interests—exactly the dynamic the framework predicts when the ruler's relationship with the interpretive class becomes adversarial.

The Military-Islamist Complex: Patronage as Coordination Mechanism

After Bashir's victory over Turabi, the coordination mechanism holding the Sudanese elite together shifted from ideological commitment to material patronage. The NIF's transformation into the National Congress Party was not merely a name change but a fundamental restructuring of the elite network from one organized around belief to one organized around extraction.

The NCP under Bashir operated as a patronage machine in which access to state resources—oil revenues, land, government contracts, import licenses, financial services—was distributed among a relatively small circle of regime insiders in exchange for political loyalty. The top leadership controlled at least 164 companies spanning construction, telecommunications, agriculture, and natural resources. Bashir's own family members held controlling interests in the cement industry and major corporate subsidiaries. The intelligence apparatus, the military, and the security services were funded generously to ensure their continued loyalty. Provincial governors and local officials were selected for their willingness to maintain the system rather than for administrative competence.

This patronage network was held together not by Islamic conviction—which had become increasingly hollow as the gap between the regime's religious rhetoric and its kleptocratic reality widened—but by the mutual understanding that everyone who benefited from the arrangement had an interest in its continuation and a vulnerability to its collapse. Senior military officers who had enriched themselves through corruption could not afford a regime change that might expose their wealth. Businessmen who had acquired assets through NIF connections could not afford a political transition that might challenge their property claims. Judges who had been appointed through tamkeen could not afford a judicial reform that might review their credentials. The network was self-reinforcing not because its members believed in Islamic governance but because they were all complicit in a system of extraction that Islamic governance had made possible and that regime change might unravel.

The Islamic narrative continued to serve a function within this patronage system, but its role had evolved from genuine legitimating ideology to what might be called decorative legitimation. The regime maintained the apparatus of Islamic governance—the Sharia courts, the Public Order Police, the religious curriculum in schools—because dismantling it would require confronting the constituencies that tamkeen and generational Islamization had created. But the regime's actual decision-making was driven by calculations about oil revenue, military procurement, and the distribution of patronage, not by theological reasoning. The interpretive class—the Islamic scholars and judges who provided religious cover—had been reduced from Turabi's role as ideological architect to the role of functionaries who provided ex post religious justification for decisions made on entirely material grounds.

This evolution from ideological to patronage-based coordination illustrates a pattern the framework identifies across multiple case studies: elite networks that initially organize around sincere belief tend to evolve toward material coordination as the founding generation is replaced by successors who have been socialized into the material benefits of the system rather than the ideological commitments that created it. The NIF's first generation—al-Turabi, Ali Osman Taha, the original Brotherhood cadres—combined genuine Islamic conviction with strategic ambition. The second generation, which came of age under Bashir's NCP, inherited the material benefits of Islamist state capture without necessarily sharing the ideological fervor that had motivated it. For this generation, the Islamic narrative was not a cause but a tool, and the elite network functioned not as a brotherhood of believers but as a syndicate of beneficiaries.

VIII. THE COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT: WHEN THE NARRATIVE REACHES ITS LIMIT

The Material Logic of Peace

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Nairobi on January 9, 2005, between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement represented, in the framework's terms, the moment at which the elite calculation underlying the Islamic narrative could no longer sustain the costs it had generated. After twenty-two years of civil war, over two million deaths, four million displaced persons, and the consumption of enormous state resources in a conflict that had failed to achieve its objective—the permanent incorporation of the south and its oil wealth into an Islamic Sudanese state—the northern elite concluded that a negotiated settlement, even one that risked the loss of the south, was preferable to the indefinite continuation of a war that was simultaneously draining the treasury, attracting international sanctions, and undermining the domestic patronage network on which the regime's survival depended.

The CPA's provisions mapped precisely onto the material interests at stake. The agreement established a six-year interim period during which southern Sudan would enjoy autonomous self-government under SPLM leadership, followed by a referendum in which southerners would choose between continued unity and independence. Oil revenues—the material prize that had driven the conflict from its inception—were to be divided fifty-fifty between the national government in Khartoum and the Government of Southern Sudan. Sharia law would apply only to Muslims, even in the north, effectively conceding the principle that had ostensibly justified the entire Islamist project: the universality of Islamic governance across Sudanese territory. Separate armies would be maintained during the interim period, with the possibility of merging into a unified force only if the referendum produced a vote for unity.

The framework's analysis reveals the CPA as the logical endpoint of a narrative strategy that had overreached. Nimeiry's September Laws had been designed to consolidate a failing dictator's power base. Al-Turabi's institutional capture had been designed to transform a political maneuver into a durable system of Islamic governance. The jihad declaration had been designed to mobilize northern populations for a resource war disguised as religious obligation. Each escalation had deepened the regime's commitment to a narrative that could not be sustained at the scale its ambitions required. The Islamic state could hold the north, where belief infrastructure made governance cheap. It could not hold the south, where the absence of shared belief made governance ruinously expensive. And it could not abandon the south without exposing the hollowness of its claim to govern a unified Islamic Sudan.

The CPA resolved this contradiction by creating a mechanism through which the regime could relinquish the south while maintaining the appearance of having sought unity. The six-year interim period was formally described as an opportunity to "make unity attractive"—to demonstrate the benefits of remaining within a reformed Sudanese state. In practice, neither party made serious efforts toward this goal. The NCP did not undertake the democratic reforms or equitable development that might have given southerners a reason to vote for unity. The SPLM, particularly after John Garang's death in a helicopter crash just three weeks after being sworn in as Sudan's First Vice President on July 9, 2005, shifted decisively toward preparing for independence rather than reforming the union. Garang's successor, Salva Kiir, and the southern leadership that surrounded him had never shared Garang's vision of a "New Sudan" and viewed the interim period not as a test of unity but as a transition to statehood.

The Referendum and Its Meaning

The referendum of January 9–15, 2011, produced the result that both the framework and political observers had predicted: 98.83 percent of southern Sudanese voted for independence. South Sudan became the world's newest sovereign state on July 9, 2011, assuming control of approximately 75 percent of Sudan's proven oil reserves in the process.

The framework reads this outcome as the definitive demonstration of its thesis about the relationship between belief and territorial control. The Sudanese Islamic state's authority had always rested on the appropriation of a belief system that was genuinely held by the northern population but fundamentally alien to the south. For three decades, the regime had attempted to extend this authority over populations who did not share the belief, using every instrument available: military force, economic coercion, the arming of proxy militias, the engineering of famine, the manipulation of ethnic divisions, and the deployment of a jihad narrative that cast the war as a cosmic struggle rather than a resource grab. Every instrument failed, because none of them could substitute for the mechanism that made governance efficient in the north: the voluntary compliance that flows from genuinely held belief. In the end, the populations who did not believe could not be governed by a system that depended on belief for its legitimacy and its efficiency.

The loss of the south also exposed the material function of the Islamic narrative with particular clarity. The immediate consequence of South Sudan's independence was the loss of approximately three-quarters of Sudan's oil revenue. The northern economy, which had become dependent on oil exports to finance the patronage network that held the regime together, entered a severe crisis. Inflation soared. The Sudanese pound collapsed. Popular unrest intensified. The regime responded with the same instruments it had always used—security crackdowns, media censorship, appeals to Islamic solidarity—but without the oil revenue to sustain the patronage system, these instruments lost effectiveness. The Islamic narrative could legitimate austerity only so far; eventually, people who were hungry, unemployed, and watching the regime's inner circle maintain its wealth while the economy deteriorated began to question whether the divine mandate was genuine or merely a cover for theft.

The framework's prediction about the relationship between economic stability and narrative sustainability was confirmed. As long as oil revenue flowed, the regime could distribute enough patronage to maintain elite cohesion and enough services to prevent mass unrest, while the Islamic narrative provided the ideological framework that made the arrangement appear legitimate. Once the material foundation was removed, the narrative proved insufficient to sustain compliance on its own. The trajectory from South Sudan's secession in 2011 to the popular revolution that overthrew Bashir in 2019 and the catastrophic civil war that engulfed Sudan in 2023 can be read as the progressive unraveling of a system that had lost the material base on which its narrative legitimacy ultimately depended.

This is Part 3 of 4 in "Sudan's Islamic Turn: Elite Appropriation of Belief and the Fracturing of a Nation (1956–2011)."

Part 4 will examine the Long-Term Consequences of Sudan's Islamist experiment—including the post-secession crisis, the 2019 revolution, and the 2023 civil war—through the framework's analytical lens. It will also provide comparative analysis with other case studies in the series, a comprehensive bibliography, and a final assessment of what the Sudanese case reveals about the durability, costs, and ultimate limitations of belief as infrastructure for elite power.

Sudan's Islamic Turn: Elite Appropriation of Belief and the Fracturing of a Nation (1956–2011)

Part 4 of 4

IX. LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES: THE UNRAVELING

The Post-Secession Crisis: When Extraction Loses Its Object

The framework's tenth analytical category—long-term consequences and pattern recognition—asks what enduring impacts an elite belief arrangement produces and whether its mechanisms persist across political transformations. In Sudan, the consequences of the Islamist experiment have been catastrophic, and their unfolding since South Sudan's secession in 2011 demonstrates with devastating clarity the framework's central thesis: that belief systems function as infrastructure for extraction, and that when the material base of extraction is removed, the belief infrastructure proves insufficient to sustain the arrangement on its own.

South Sudan's independence in July 2011 deprived the Khartoum regime of approximately seventy-five percent of its oil revenue—a loss that was as predictable as it was devastating, since oil had accounted for roughly ninety-five percent of the country's export earnings. The regime had spent three decades constructing an elaborate apparatus of Islamic governance, institutional capture, and patronage distribution, all of which required continuous funding. The tamkeen networks expected their salaries. The military expected its procurement budgets. The security apparatus expected its operational funding. The commercial elites connected to the NCP expected continued access to profitable contracts and import licenses. The regime had committed itself to maintaining the Darfur counterinsurgency, supporting the war economy that sustained the Janjaweed militias, and financing the broader infrastructure of Islamic governance—the courts, the educational system, the religious bureaucracy—that legitimated the entire arrangement.

When the oil revenue disappeared, the patronage system began to collapse. The regime imposed austerity measures that the International Monetary Fund had recommended but that contradicted the implicit social contract the Islamic state had offered its northern constituency: acceptance of authoritarian governance in exchange for economic stability. Inflation spiraled. The Sudanese pound lost more than half its value.

Unemployment rose sharply. Bread prices, always the barometer of popular discontent in Sudanese politics, became a source of recurring crisis. The regime responded as it always had—with security crackdowns, media censorship, and appeals to Islamic solidarity—but these instruments were losing their effectiveness because the material conditions that had made them tolerable were evaporating.

The framework predicts precisely this trajectory. Economic stability is identified as one of the conditions for a stable elite system; economic crisis is identified as a condition that "undermines material legitimacy" and destabilizes the arrangement. The Islamic narrative could legitimate austerity to a point—sacrifice in the name of faith, patience as spiritual discipline, trust in divine provision—but that point was bounded by the population's actual experience of deprivation. When university graduates who had been educated entirely within the Islamist system could not find employment, when families who had accepted the regime's authority as divinely sanctioned could not afford bread, when the gap between the regime elite's visible wealth and the population's visible suffering became too wide to bridge with religious rhetoric, the narrative's force-multiplying effect began to decay. The belief was still present—three decades of generational transmission had ensured that—but its capacity to generate voluntary compliance with an extractive arrangement was diminishing because the arrangement was no longer delivering the minimum material returns that even a belief-sustained system requires.

The 2019 Revolution: When the Infrastructure of Belief Meets the Arithmetic of Hunger

On December 19, 2018, schoolgirls in Atbara marched into a market chanting anti-austerity slogans after the price of bread tripled and their school meals doubled in cost. Residents joined them. The local headquarters of the National Congress Party was set on fire. Within days, protests had spread to cities across Sudan—Damazin, Al-Gedarif, Madani, Nyala, Port Sudan, and ultimately Khartoum itself. The movement that followed was the most sustained and widespread popular mobilization in Sudanese post-colonial history, and it accomplished what decades of armed rebellion, international sanctions, and ICC indictments had not: the removal of Omar al-Bashir from power.

The revolution's dynamics confirm and complicate the framework's analysis in important ways. The immediate trigger was economic—the tripling of bread prices, itself a consequence of the post-secession loss of oil revenue and years of fiscal mismanagement. But the movement rapidly transcended economic grievance to become a comprehensive rejection of the Inqaz ("salvation") regime that had ruled since 1989. The Forces of Freedom and Change, the coalition that coordinated the protests, brought together an astonishing breadth of Sudanese society: the Sudanese Professionals Association (an umbrella of seventeen trade unions), women's organizations, neighborhood resistance committees, political parties from across the spectrum, and—critically—young people who had been born and educated entirely under the

Islamist system. The very generation that tamkeen and educational Islamization had been designed to produce as loyal subjects of the Islamic state became the generation that demanded its dissolution.

The framework would identify this as a failure of generational transmission—a breakdown in the mechanism by which appropriated belief converts into self-sustaining compliance. But the failure was more nuanced than simple rejection. Many of the young Sudanese who participated in the revolution were devout Muslims who had no objection to Islam itself; what they rejected was the instrumentalization of Islam as a cover for corruption, authoritarianism, and elite self-enrichment. They could see what the framework describes as the "gap between narrative and reality"—the gap between the regime's claim to govern in God's name and the visible evidence that it governed in its own interest. The discovery of suitcases containing over five million British pounds and five billion Sudanese pounds at Bashir's residence after his arrest provided the kind of concrete evidence that punctured the narrative's credibility in a way that abstract theological argument never could.

The military's response to the revolution illustrates the framework's analysis of what happens when elite coordination fractures under material pressure. Bashir had deliberately fragmented Sudan's security apparatus into three competing entities—the Sudanese Armed Forces under General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the National Intelligence and Security Service under Salah Gosh, and the Rapid Support Forces under Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti—to prevent any single security actor from threatening his position. This fragmentation, which had served Bashir's personal survival strategy for years, proved fatal to the regime's collective survival when the crisis came. As Bashir's capacity to fund all three security organs simultaneously declined, each developed independent revenue streams and increasingly autonomous interests. When protesters massed outside the military headquarters in April 2019, the security elite calculated that their interests were better served by removing Bashir and preserving their own positions than by defending a president whose capacity to distribute patronage had collapsed. On April 11, the military removed Bashir. He was taken to Kober Prison—the same facility where he had imprisoned thousands of his opponents over thirty years.

The revolution's aftermath, however, demonstrated the framework's warning about the durability of elite power across political transformations. Bashir was removed, but the structures he had built were not dismantled. The military officers who removed him—Burhan, Hemedti, Gosh—were products of the very system the protesters sought to dismantle. The Transitional Military Council that replaced Bashir was, as protesters immediately recognized, "the same faces and entities that our great people have revolted against." The subsequent power-sharing arrangement between the military and civilian forces—the Sovereignty Council, the appointment of technocratic Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok—represented an uneasy compromise that left the fundamental structures of military-Islamist power intact while providing a civilian facade.

The framework predicts that such compromises are unstable because they leave the material foundations of elite power unchallenged. The military retained control of the security apparatus, the economic assets accumulated through tamkeen and kleptocratic extraction, and the institutional networks that had sustained the NIF/NCP regime. The civilians controlled a government that lacked independent enforcement capacity, independent revenue, or independent institutional infrastructure. The military's October 2021 coup—in which Burhan dissolved the civilian components of the transitional government, arrested Hamdok and other civilian leaders, and reimposed military rule—confirmed the prediction. When the veneer of civilian governance became inconvenient, the material holders of power simply removed it.

The 2023 Civil War: The Final Fragmentation

The civil war that erupted on April 15, 2023, between Burhan's SAF and Hemedti's RSF represents, in the framework's terms, the terminal stage of the elite arrangement that Nimeiry's September Laws had initiated forty years earlier. The war is not a new phenomenon but the logical conclusion of a system in which belief was captured, institutions were purged, wealth was extracted, and security forces were fragmented—all in the name of an Islamic governance project that had long since been hollowed of its ideological content.

The immediate trigger was a dispute over the integration of the RSF into the regular armed forces—a provision of the transitional framework that both sides recognized as an existential threat to their respective power bases. Integration under SAF command would have subordinated Hemedti's independently wealthy and militarily formidable paramilitary to Burhan's institutional authority. Integration under a neutral command would have diluted the SAF's monopoly on conventional military legitimacy. Neither side was willing to accept subordination, because neither side's power rested on constitutional authority or popular legitimacy; both rested on the capacity to deploy violence and distribute patronage to their respective networks.

The framework's analysis reveals the war's deeper genealogy. Burhan, a career military officer who had served in the Darfur counterinsurgency, increasingly relied on the Islamist networks that Bashir had built. Former NCP officials were reinstated to senior positions. Islamist militias—including the al-Baraa Bin Malik Brigade, named after a historical Islamic warrior—fought alongside SAF forces. The old Islamist guard, removed from power by the 2019 revolution, was quietly rehabilitating itself under Burhan's protection, providing the organizational capacity and ideological framework that the SAF officer corps alone could not generate. In this sense, the Islamist infrastructure that tamkeen had created was demonstrating the persistence the framework predicts: institutional capture, once accomplished, creates constituencies and networks that survive the removal of the specific leaders who initiated the capture.

Hemedti, for his part, positioned the RSF as opponents of Islamism—claiming to be fighting against "radical Islamists" and the return of Bashir's regime. This framing was

strategically convenient but historically absurd: the RSF's origins lay in the Janjaweed militias that Bashir's Islamist government had created and armed to prosecute the Darfur genocide. Hemedti himself had been a Janjaweed commander who earned the sobriquet "Butcher of Darfur" for his role in the 2003–2005 atrocities. His wealth—estimated in the hundreds of millions, derived primarily from gold mining operations in Darfur—had been accumulated within the patronage networks of the Islamist state. His anti-Islamist rhetoric was a narrative construction designed for international consumption, particularly for the UAE, which backed the RSF financially and diplomatically while pursuing its own regional interests.

The war has produced humanitarian devastation that surpasses even the worst years of the second civil war. By early 2025, over twelve million people had been displaced—nine million internally and three and a half million as refugees. Famine conditions spread across multiple regions. Both sides committed documented war crimes: the RSF engaged in ethnic massacres against non-Arab populations in Darfur—repeating, with sickening precision, the patterns of the 2003 genocide—while the SAF conducted indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilian areas. The economic costs exceeded all prior conflicts since Sudanese independence. The state itself appeared to be fragmenting, with two rival governments claiming authority—the SAF-backed government in Port Sudan and the RSF's self-declared "Government of Peace and Unity" in Nyala.

The framework reads this catastrophe as the ultimate consequence of the system that the September Laws initiated. Nimeiry appropriated Islam to survive a political crisis. Turabi captured the state in Islam's name to build an Islamist utopia that doubled as an extraction machine. Bashir defeated Turabi and converted the Islamist state into a personal kleptocracy sustained by oil revenue and justified by residual Islamic rhetoric. South Sudan's secession removed the oil revenue. The 2019 revolution removed the dictator. But it did not remove the fragmented security apparatus, the patronage-dependent military elite, the Islamist institutional networks, or the weapons that three decades of continuous warfare had distributed across the country. The 2023 war is what happens when all of these elements—products of the belief-as-infrastructure system—collide in the absence of either a unifying narrative or a material base sufficient to hold them together.

X. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: SUDAN IN THE FRAMEWORK'S PATTERN LIBRARY

The Universal Pattern and Its Sudanese Expression

The Sudanese case confirms the framework's core thesis while revealing specific mechanisms with particular clarity. Across the case studies in this series—from Akhenaten's religious revolution to Constantine's appropriation of Christianity, from the Cathar suppression to the Iranian Revolution—the same fundamental pattern recurs: small elites control large populations by appropriating pre-existing belief systems, engineering their interpretation to legitimate extraction, and suppressing alternatives that threaten the monopoly on meaning. Sudan demonstrates this pattern under modern documentary conditions that eliminate the inferential gaps present in ancient and medieval cases.

Several comparative insights emerge with particular force from the Sudanese material.

The relationship between appropriation and invention operates in Sudan exactly as the framework's comparative analysis predicts. Nimeiry's appropriated elements—the identification of the state with Islam, the deployment of Islamic identity as a marker of political legitimacy—proved extraordinarily durable. The September Laws were never repealed; the Islamic character of the northern state persisted across every subsequent regime change. The invented elements—Nimeiry's personal rule as "imam," the specific hudud punishments, the theatrical public spectacles—collapsed with Nimeiry himself. This differential durability mirrors the pattern observed in every other case study: Constantine's Christianity survived the fall of Rome; the specific imperial theology attached to Constantine's person did not. Stalin's Russian nationalism survived the Soviet Union; Marxist-Leninist ideology as a genuine popular belief did not. Appropriation endures because it taps roots that predate the appropriating elite; invention dies because it has no roots independent of the elite that created it.

The Turabi-Bashir split provides one of the clearest modern examples of the "Ruler vs. Priesthood" dynamic the framework identifies as a recurring structural conflict across civilizations. The pattern—in which the intellectual architect of a belief-based power system is defeated by the military commander who controls actual coercive capacity—mirrors Henry VIII's triumph over papal authority, the Ottoman sultans' subordination of the ulema, and the Chinese emperors' management of the Confucian scholar-bureaucracy. In each case, when the ruler controls the treasury and the army, ideological authority alone cannot sustain the interpretive class against material power. Turabi's defeat by Bashir in 1999 was not a theological dispute but a power struggle resolved by the same instruments that resolve such struggles everywhere: soldiers, prisons, and control of state revenue.

The Five Conditions analysis of the southern war provides a testable application of the framework's suppression theory. The comparison with successful suppression cases—particularly the Cathar crusade—is instructive. The Cathars were successfully eliminated because all five conditions were met: unified elite (the papacy, the French crown, and the northern French nobility coordinated); geographic containment (Languedoc was a defined, accessible territory); target vulnerability (the Cathars had no military capacity); overwhelming force (the Albigensian Crusade plus the Inquisition);

and multi-generational persistence (suppression continued for over a century). In Sudan, the elite was divided, the territory was vast and uncontainable, the target developed significant military capacity through external support, and the force applied, though devastating, never achieved total infrastructure destruction. The comparison demonstrates that the Five Conditions framework operates predictively: knowing which conditions were and were not met in Sudan would have allowed an analyst to predict, at any point during the war, that suppression would fail.

The Darfur genocide reveals a mechanism the framework identifies but that is sometimes underappreciated: the capacity of appropriated belief systems to generate violence against populations within the nominal community of believers. This is not unique to Sudan. The Shia-Sunni conflicts across Islamic history, the Catholic-Protestant wars of early modern Europe, and the Stalinist purges that targeted committed Communists all demonstrate that belief systems used as infrastructure for elite power will eventually be turned against any group—including believers—whose material interests or political aspirations conflict with the elite's extraction requirements. In Darfur, the regime's Islamic narrative could not prevent the massacre of fellow Muslims because the narrative was never the actual driver of policy; the actual driver was the elite's need to control land and resources, and the narrative simply provided the vocabulary in which that control was expressed and justified.

Finally, the Sudanese case provides an unusually complete illustration of the framework's trajectory model: the life cycle of a belief-as-infrastructure system from initial appropriation through institutional capture, wealth extraction, information control, resistance, and eventual fragmentation. Few cases in the series offer such a complete arc within a single generation's living memory. The entire cycle—from Nimeiry's desperate political calculation in 1983 to the catastrophic civil war of 2023—unfolded in forty years, a period short enough that individuals who witnessed the September Laws also witnessed the fall of Bashir and the fragmentation of the state those laws helped create. This temporal compression makes Sudan an invaluable case for testing the framework's predictions about sequence, causation, and outcome across the full life cycle of elite belief appropriation.

XI. CONCLUSION: BELIEF AS INFRASTRUCTURE, BELIEF AS RUIN

The Sudanese case demonstrates, with a clarity that its human costs make painful to acknowledge, the central thesis of the Analytical Framework for Elite Power and Belief Systems: that belief functions as infrastructure for elite extraction, that its appropriation produces arrangements of extraordinary durability and efficiency, and that its instrumentalization generates consequences that eventually exceed the capacity of the instrumentalizing elite to control.

Nimeiry's September Laws were a transparently political maneuver by a failing dictator who had exhausted every other source of legitimacy. The documentary record is unambiguous about this. Yet the belief infrastructure he activated—centuries of genuine Islamic devotion, deeply embedded in family practice and communal identity—proved so powerful that it outlived Nimeiry, survived his overthrow, constrained his democratic successors, enabled Turabi and Bashir's far more systematic capture of the state, legitimated three decades of kleptocratic extraction, justified two genocidal campaigns, facilitated the fracturing of the nation through South Sudan's secession, and continues to shape the catastrophic civil war that is destroying what remains of the Sudanese state.

The framework does not argue that this outcome was inevitable. Contingency matters: if Nimeiry had been overthrown before the September Laws, if Taha's progressive Islamic vision had prevailed, if the Addis Ababa Agreement had been maintained, if Turabi had succeeded in building a genuine Islamic democracy rather than a captured state—the trajectory might have been different. But the framework does argue that the pattern is recognizable and, to a significant degree, predictable. When elites appropriate deeply embedded belief systems to legitimate extraction, certain consequences follow with high probability: the narrative becomes a constraint on subsequent elites even as it remains a tool; alternative interpretations are suppressed, narrowing the interpretive space; institutional capture creates constituencies whose material interests depend on the arrangement's continuation; populations outside the belief's domain can only be controlled through expensive coercion rather than cheap compliance; and the system's stability depends on economic performance that the extraction itself may undermine.

Every one of these predictions was confirmed in Sudan. The September Laws constrained every subsequent government. Taha's alternative was eliminated. Tamkeen created a self-reinforcing institutional constituency. The south could only be governed through devastating warfare. And the loss of southern oil revenue—the material consequence of pursuing an Islamic state that the south would never accept—triggered the economic crisis that ultimately brought the system down.

The human cost has been staggering. Over two million dead in the second civil war. Three hundred thousand dead in Darfur. Twelve million displaced in the current conflict and counting. A nation fractured, a state collapsing, a population scattered across the region as refugees. These numbers represent the price of belief deployed as infrastructure for power—the price paid not by the elites who deployed it but by the populations in whose name it was deployed.

The framework is descriptive, not normative. It does not argue that Islam is false, that Sudanese Muslims were foolish to believe, or that the aspiration for Islamic governance was illegitimate. It argues that the mechanism by which that aspiration was captured, directed, and instrumentalized follows a pattern observable across civilizations, religions, and centuries—a pattern in which belief's extraordinary power to organize human cooperation is harnessed by small groups for purposes that serve their interests at the expense of the populations whose sincere faith makes the arrangement possible.

Sudan is the smoking gun. The evidence is modern, documented, and unambiguous. The pattern is ancient, universal, and persistent. And the consequences are still unfolding, in the burning streets of Khartoum and the refugee camps of Chad and South Sudan, where millions of people are living with the results of a political calculation made in a presidential palace in September 1983 by a dictator who needed the Brotherhood's support to survive another year in power.

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END OF STUDY

This case study applies the Analytical Framework for Elite Power and Belief Systems (V2.1) integrated with the Expanded Core Framework (8-Part Structure) to the period from Sudanese independence in 1956 through South Sudan's secession in 2011, with analysis of consequences extending to 2025. The Sudanese case demonstrates, under modern documentary conditions, how elite appropriation of pre-existing belief systems functions as infrastructure for extraction, institutional capture, and population control—and how the instrumentalization of belief generates consequences that ultimately exceed the instrumentalizing elite's capacity to manage.

The study demonstrates the framework's predictive capacity: the durability of appropriation versus the fragility of invention, the structural outcome of ruler-versus-priesthood conflicts, the conditions under which suppression succeeds or fails, the relationship between economic stability and narrative sustainability, and the trajectory from elite appropriation through institutional capture to eventual fragmentation when the material base of the arrangement is removed.

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